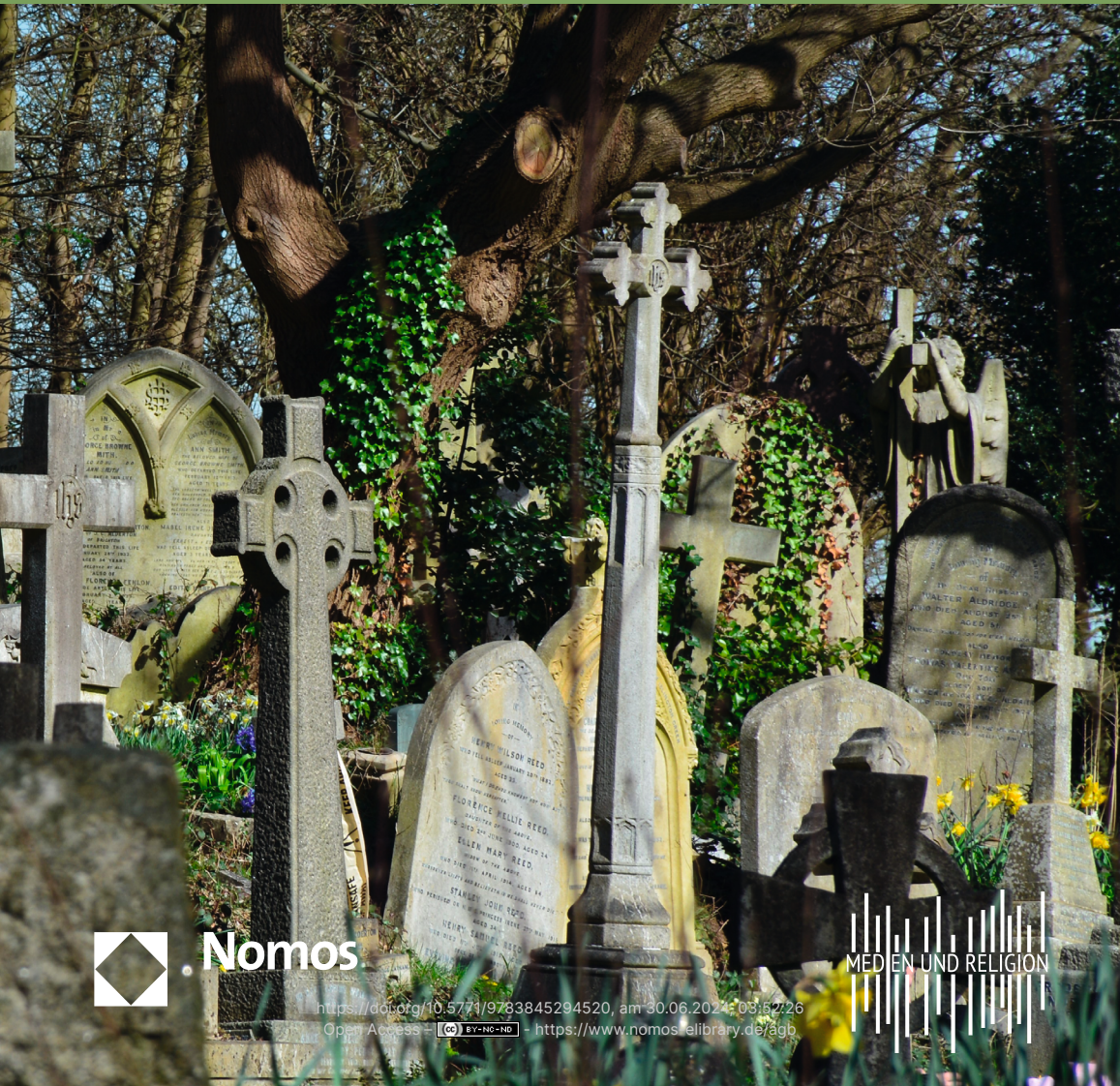


Marie-Therese Mäder | Alberto Saviello | Baldassare Scolari [eds.]

# Highgate Cemetery

Image Practices in Past and Present



Nomos

<https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845294520>, am 30.06.2024 08:57:26  
Open Access - - <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>



## Media and Religion | Medien und Religion

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Volume 1 | Band 1

Marie-Therese Mäder | Alberto Saviello | Baldassare Scolari [eds.]

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© Coverpicture: Graves in the East Cemetery (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018)

The publication was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).



SCHWEIZERISCHER NATIONALFONDS  
ZUR FÖRDERUNG DER WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FORSCHUNG

**The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

ISBN 978-3-8487-5277-5 (Print)  
978-3-8452-9452-0 (ePDF)

#### **British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-3-8487-5277-5 (Print)  
978-3-8452-9452-0 (ePDF)

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Mäder, Marie-Therese / Saviello, Alberto / Scolari, Baldassare  
Highgate Cemetery

Image Practices in Past and Present

Marie-Therese Mäder / Alberto Saviello / Baldassare Scolari (eds.)

376 pp.

Includes bibliographic references.

ISBN 978-3-8487-5277-5 (Print)  
978-3-8452-9452-0 (ePDF)

1st Edition 2020

© Marie-Therese Mäder / Alberto Saviello / Baldassare Scolari (eds.)

Published by

Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG  
Waldseestraße 3-5 | 76530 Baden-Baden  
[www.nomos.de](http://www.nomos.de)

Production of the printed version:

Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG  
Waldseestraße 3-5 | 76530 Baden-Baden

ISBN (Print): 978-3-8487-5277-5  
ISBN (ePDF): 978-3-8452-9452-0

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845294520>



Onlineversion  
Nomos eLibrary



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## Preface

The current volume is the third publication of the interdisciplinary research network *International Exchange on Media and Religion*. The publication distinguishes itself from the previous two projects of the network insofar as we decided to focus on a single object – Highgate Cemetery in London– whilst asking questions from different perspectives. The interdisciplinary approach, which not only shapes the volume itself but also most of the single contributions, offers a diversity of insights, not only into Highgate cemetery’s past and present state but also into the general role of images in socio-religious practices. By choosing Highgate cemetery as a single focus and source we intended to bring anthropology, art history, history, literary studies, media studies, philosophy, study of religion, and theology into conversation with each other.

Besides the different theories and scholarly methods presented in each chapter, the project itself applied a specific working mode. During two workshops in London hosted by Heythrop College in 2016 and 2017 the authors extensively discussed each of the papers. In addition we visited the cemetery together, the west part in a guided tour and the east part on our own. To work together on the same object, visiting it, and experiencing this extraordinary place proved to be extremely fruitful for our thinking. The theoretical and methodical discussions left the university building and took place on site. The individual impressions that were collectively shared enriched our images/perception of the cemetery and each single contribution. By walking between the tomb stones, trees, and grave figures many conversations between the researchers from England, Germany, Italy and Switzerland evolved and personal experiences were exchanged. The aim of this working mode was to test and intertwine different approaches to analyse the multilayered and complex network of images which constitute Highgate Cemetery, both as an actual and as a medial place. The presentation of the work at the annual conference of the European Association of the Study of Religion (EASR) in Bern (CH) in 2018 was not only a wonderful reunion with colleagues but also showed the fruit of our collaboration.

The project was possible thanks to the support of various institutions and people. Heythrop College kindly hosted the group on two occasions with the help of Ann Jeffers and Sean Ryan. The Center for Religion, Economy and Politics at the University of Zurich (ZRWP), the Ludwig-

## *Preface*

Maximillian-Universität München (LMU), the research group Media and Religion, the personal funding of each researcher made this project possible, and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), which funded this publication. And finally our special recognition goes to Sean Ryan who proofread the chapters with great attention, precision and endless patience.

The structure of the table of contents mirrors the different approaches and narratives that were developed in our workshops during which conspicuous similarities between papers led to their being clustered into grouped sections. Thematically, the book does not aim to exhaustively cover Highgate cemetery and its history, but rather the section titles open-up the particular realms and topics that our academic exchange about image practices at Highgate cemetery creatively generated. The following introduction aims to shed light on this complex phenomenon.

Zürich, Frankfurt/M, Meilen, autumn 2020

Marie-Therese Mäder

Alberto Saviello

Baldassare Scolari

# Image Practices at Highgate Past and Present

## Introduction

*Marie-Therese Mäder, Alberto Saviello, Baldassare Scolari*

Highgate Cemetery has many faces. In 1839 the commercially-driven London Cemetery Company opened «The Cemetery of St James at Highgate», the western half of the present-day cemetery, which quickly became one of the most popular burial grounds for wealthy London families.<sup>1</sup> The demand was so great that in 1854 another adjacent plot, the part east of Swain's Lane, was purchased. The remains of more than 170,000 deceased people are resting at Highgate Cemetery, which continues today to be an active burial site and a place of personal mourning and family remembrance.<sup>2</sup>

However, Highgate Cemetery is also a tourist spot. It is the most popular of the «Magnificent Seven» – as the seven cemeteries built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century around London are called. Today managed by a non-profit trust, it annually attracts about 70,000 visitors guided by different intentions.<sup>3</sup> The famous tomb monument of Karl Marx and on a more modest scale the grave of the novelist and avowed atheist Douglas Adams, both in the eastern part of the cemetery, serve as kinds of secular pilgrimage sites where like-minded people gather to remember their «idols» and to give expression to the worldviews associated with them. At the same time, the natural landscape of the cemetery, which was once accurately and formally planted but is today tended more naturalistically, offers a place of recreation and retreat that can also be explored as a place of natural history.<sup>4</sup> In the 1960s and 70s the then neglected cemetery, which had been closed for several years, was even considered a haunted place where ghosts and vampires were sighted and occult practices were celebrated. The unique atmosphere of the cemetery has continually inspired artists and the cemetery has become the setting for numerous novels as well as serving as a backdrop in

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1 On the history of Highgate Cemetery see especially Barker 1984 and Bulmer 2014.

2 See Bulmer 2014, 8.

3 See Symington 2011, 15.

4 Tours focusing on the flora and fauna of the cemetery are offered by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery; see the article by Marie-Therese Mäder in this volume.

various films.<sup>5</sup> The western part, which nowadays can only be visited on guided tours, can be regarded as an open-air museum of the distinctive cult of the dead and the stylistic eclecticism of the Victorian era. Thus, it was aptly described by the British poet Sir John Betjeman as «Victorian Valhalla».<sup>6</sup> Highgate's history offers a window into Victorian and contemporary society and politics, exemplified by its handling of death, a topic Ann Jeffers provides further insights into, complementing this introduction. In her chapter «The Politics of Death/Death and Politics in Victorian England» she considers the various sociological, economic and political dimensions that undergird the creation and history of Highgate Cemetery until the present day.<sup>7</sup>

As the various contributions to this volume reflect, Highgate cemetery is not only a burial site but is also a place of pilgrimage, a museum, a nature reserve, a recreational area, a «haunted» place and a stimulus to artistic invention. The chapters in this volume are dedicated to images and image practices in and around Highgate. We use a decidedly wide definition of «image» that includes material and literary as well as mental images. Further, we understand Highgate Cemetery as a constellation of images. This refers to the location itself, where various images are set in relation to one another providing a larger context for image perceptions and meaning making practices, as well as to the representations of the cemetery in different media that constitute another kind of constellation outside of the actual place.

The book collects contributions from scholars of different academic disciplines who often choose an interdisciplinary approach to focus on one or more specific images. They discuss the manifold representations of and at Highgate, their respective functions in different practices and how images and practices are intertwined in meaning making processes.

In this introduction we explain why we consider the modern cemetery a particularly fruitful object for the investigation of socio-religious image practices and the different dimensions of image practices. Of central importance for our theoretical approach is the relationship between material images and the imaginary. The latter we understand as collectively shared

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5 On different novels see the article by Niels Penke in this volume. The films that use Highgate as a location are mainly fantasy or horror films like *Taste the Blood of Dracula* from 1970. More recent films include *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (2018), *Hampstead* (2017) and *Dorian Gray* (2009).

6 See Highgate Cemetery 1978, 2. On the Victorian obsession with death see Rutherford 2010 and Curl 1972.

7 See Ann Jeffers' contribution on «The Politics of Death» in this volume.

and handed-down, but at the same time as a continuously changing pool of images and ideas. Every concrete image practice necessarily refers to the imaginary and at the same time has an effect on it. We argue that the cemetery, as a place that confronts its visitors with death, afterlife and memory, occupies a prominent position in the iteration and transformation of religious images and the religious imaginary.

*Heterotopia and Liminality: Cemeteries as Spaces of Image Production*

The special relevance of burial grounds for modern image practices can be deduced from two corresponding theoretical models. Remarkably, Michel Foucault chose the 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery as one of his main examples to elucidate his notion of heterotopia.<sup>8</sup> Heterotopia refers to a place outside of everyday life. In fact, the cemeteries were deliberately built on the outskirts of the metropolises. Due to rapid population growth the traditional burial sites in the inner city churchyards had become overfilled with human remains. This was not only an ethical and aesthetic problem, but also a sanitary concern. The bodies were buried on top of each other and covered with so little soil that they were occasionally flushed out in the rain or even stolen by body snatchers. The condition of the graveyards was regarded as a threat to public health: the corpses were understood to emit harmful «miasma» and death was considered to be contagious.<sup>9</sup> Hence the dead had to be segregated from the centre of everyday life and, instead, came to be housed, following an ancient model of the necropolis, in their own «cities» at the periphery of the Victorian metropolises. The hygienic problems of the 19<sup>th</sup> church graveyards that resulted in the displacement of the burial grounds also found expression in epitaphs and tombstone designs. As *Ann Jeffers* observes in her contribution «Animal, Vegetable or Mineral? Performativity of Living Images in Highgate Cemetery» representations of plants and animals on individual sepulchral monuments constituted an «ethico-hygenic» space to brighten the onlookers' feelings and to improve morality. Referring to contemporary poetry and other literary sources she shows how these images of nature, often associated with women, were

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8 See Foucault 1984. The Foucauldian model of heterotopia has also been fruitfully applied to Highgate Cemetery by Clements 2017.

9 See Foucault 1984, 6.

symbols and icons with a corresponding emblematic character to oppose the negative connotations of bodily decay.<sup>10</sup>

Although the modern necropolises were detached from the cities of the living and were governed according to their own rules and regulations, yet the arrangement of the cemetery, for example the implicit hierarchy of burial plots and tombs and the segregated sections for different denominations and faiths, mirrored the structures of society.<sup>11</sup> As a burial ground that was open to the followers of all religions and non-religious people and that had an area reserved for pauper's graves, the cemetery was committed to the ideal of religious and social community building. As *Baldassare Scolari* highlights in his contribution «Remembering Karl Marx. Image – Icon – Idol», «a sort of cosmopolitan necropolis for leftist activists, politicians and intellectuals» has formed around the tomb of Karl Marx in the eastern part of the cemetery, transforming the latter into a place of political contestation and identification.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the cemetery offered different opportunities for social (re-)positioning. Being an «other place», the cemetery was not intended to be a mere reflection of society. Foucault characterises the heterotopia rather as a «utopia» in a real site. Representing society and at the same time being spatially dissociated from its centre, the cemetery offers a place for a creative and sometimes even subversive use of images that can deviate from normative modes and forms of representation and can try out new semantics and structures. This is what *Dolores Zoé Bertschinger* considers in her discussion of a radical feminist imaginary in «Looking for Jenny & Co. The Image as Practice for a Feminist Imaginary». Visitors have the potential to actively control the imagination and interpretation of objects. By looking for women's representation, Highgate Cemetery can become a place where history is performed through the remembrance of women and their achievements.<sup>13</sup> Bertschinger's contribution shows that the recipients are not at all passive «consumers» of pre-established meanings and highlights that, on the contrary, every act of perception and interpretation is able to generate new feelings, ideas and mental images.

Further examples show the permeability of social hierarchies at the cemetery with some prominent tombs of people who were deemed not quite respectable or even dishonourable. The circus owner and stunt man

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10 See Ann Jeffers' contribution «Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?» in this volume.

11 See Foucault 1984, 3–4.

12 See Baldassare Scolari's contribution in this volume.

13 See Dolores Zoé Bertschinger's contribution in this volume.

Andrew Ducrow (1793–1842) or the convicted murderer and quack John St. John Long (1798–1831) were able, thanks to their own financial resources or supporters, to erect flashy tombs in the immediate vicinity of highly respected contemporaries which at the time led to some controversy.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the heterotopia of the cemetery provides a space of compensation in which the symbolic reproduction of society allowed one to change or at least to move within its hierarchies.

Highgate Cemetery can therefore also be interpreted according to economic law, namely as a club that is the more exclusive the harder it is to become a «member». This perspective is taken by *Michael Ulrich* in his chapter «Highgate Cemetery at a Crossroads: How to Take the Right Turn? A Contribution Based on the Economic Theory of Clubs». In his theoretical deliberations Ulrich considers an optimal balance between the quantity of visitors and burials, cost of graves and the optimal degree of vegetation to protect Highgate's «imaginative power» and to preserve the possibility for liminal experiences. He concludes that a partial equilibrium is possible taking into account all the variables.

In the case of a cemetery the spatial aspect of the heterotopia is additionally accompanied by a heterochrony.<sup>15</sup> The ever-progressing time of everyday life seems suspended and the remembrance of the deceased makes the past especially present in this place. Furthermore, the cemetery confronts the short span of human life with different concepts of time, such as religious ideas of afterlife, or cyclically renewing nature. *Paola von Wyss-Giacosa's* chapter «Requiescant in Pace. Staging Nature as a Socio-Religious Practice in Highgate Cemetery» describes these qualities of the new cemeteries that provided a space for different performative practices. While the cemeteries were places of leisure and recreation through the enjoyment of the gardened landscape, the flora and fauna were also perceived as an image of timelessness that supports the mourners dealing with their loss and conveyed comfort.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Both men were buried at Kensal Green Cemetery, the first of the Magnificent Seven cemeteries to be opened in 1832, Long in 1834 and Ducrow in 1842. The huge and pompously decorated monuments were criticised by contemporaries as being stylistically crude and vulgar (in the case of Ducrow) and inappropriate to the (missing) merits of the buried persons (regarding both). See Cunningham 1871, 103; Brooks 2001, 211, 226–227; Moulder 2001, 254–255; Matthews 2004, 207–209.

15 See Foucault 1984, 6–7.

16 See Paola von Wyss-Giacosa's contribution in this volume.

Cemeteries can also be addressed as sites of liminal experiences. They are border areas marking an in-between that separates and connects two spheres at the same time. Topographically, the cemetery does not only lie on the «fringe» of the city, but it also defines a «threshold» on which the living come into contact with the dead and this world with the hereafter. Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Strang highlighted a similar aspect. In his famous guide to the Necropolis of Glasgow from 1831, he specifically focused on the gravestone as a threshold and called it a «monument placed on the confines of two worlds [...] which points out the termination of this life's miseries on the one hand, and the beginning of a blessed immortality on the other.»<sup>17</sup> The tombstone thus opens the horizon of experience to the hereafter, but at the same time alienates the world and enables a kind of external perspective on one's own existence. The concept of threshold opens up different approaches to the use and perception of cemeteries. Besides understanding Highgate as a landscape and a text, *Carla Danani* expands the notion of the threshold in her hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. A threshold not only connects realms like life and death, past and present, but also public and private. Her contribution «Experiencing Highgate Cemetery as a Place: Landscape, Text, Threshold» further highlights that as a point of discontinuity the threshold is a space of liminal experience and a tool for novelties.<sup>18</sup>

The term «liminality» refers to a theory developed by the anthropologist Victor Turner that follows Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* (1909) focusing on the threshold and transformation phase in rites of passage.<sup>19</sup> The latter take place to achieve a change in a person's or a group's social status. Puberty rituals, marriages and funerals belong to these rites. They normally consist of a set of several distinct actions and are divided into three stages: liminality is a characteristic of the central second stage when the participants have already been separated from their group and former social status (phase one) but have not yet completed their transformation to be finally reintegrated into society (phase three). The phase of liminality, in which participants are temporally detached from everyday social norms and conventions, is not only regarded as the critical stage of transformation but also as a time of creativity. Symbols that represent the cultural order and structure of society play an important part in transformations rituals. Especially during the phase of liminality, they can be creative-

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17 Strang 1831, 56.

18 See Carla Danani's contribution in this volume.

19 See Turner 1969.



ly acted out and retain new meanings. Accordingly, Turner claimed «Liminality is the mother of invention.»<sup>20</sup> Following Turner, the concept of liminality was applied not only to concrete topographical thresholds such as gates, borders, harbours and cemeteries but also to the (ritual) use of objects, (theatrical) performances and the reception of artworks.<sup>21</sup> The latter is considered by *Natalie Fritz* in her contribution «Highgate Cemetery – A City of Angels» that discusses the many angel figures at the cemetery as a liminal motif. Supposed to be mediators between the immanent and the transcendent, the realms of the living and the dead, angels not only represent religious concepts of afterlife but are also mediums of personal imagination located in a liminal in-between. In their function as figurative interfaces they bodily and emphatically address the onlookers and shape the images and practices through which the deceased person is remembered.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to the heterotopia, liminal experiences effect a temporary detachment from normative social structures and enable a creative use and procession of images and symbols. As a «different place» and as a site of liminal experiences, the cemetery appears to be a promising object for the investigation of images practices.

### *Images as Socio-Religious Practices*

We propose to distinguish between five modes of practices, by which material images can achieve social and religious meaning. These modes don't exclude each other but might intersect, are necessary co-active and mutually function as co-agents. To understand how objects acquire meaning we have to keep in mind all five levels of action.

First, material images themselves are the product of a practice. Most of the material objects are products of creative work. We speak here of the *practice of the image production*. According to this mode, the following questions are central: Who is producing the image? For whom is the image produced? Who finances the production?

Secondly, material images achieve meaning only when someone is watching, observing, or interpreting them. This *practice of the image reception* is always anchored in specific social, cultural and historical traditions in which the concrete materiality and the specific aesthetic of an image are

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20 Turner 1974, 10.

21 See for example Fischer-Lichte 2004; Krüger/Saviello 2017; Krüger 2018.

22 See Natalie Fritz's contribution in this volume.

perceived and become meaningful. Each culture, historical time and social group has its own specific way of looking, its own (pre-)understanding of visual and multi-sensory signs, shaping what it expects from the observed image. In reference to this mode of practice the following questions are central: What are the material and aesthetic properties of the image? Who is watching (consuming) it? Who has access to the image (and who does not)? With whom, in what context and for what purpose is the image observed?

Thirdly, material images can be used in different kind of practices (rituals, concerts, speeches, recitation, etc.). Here too, the analysis of the *use of images within practices* should pay attention to the historical, cultural and social context in which the images are enacted. It is essential to grasp the image's meaning for the involved agents. As before, we have to ask: Who is using the images, with whom and for what purpose?

Fourth, images themselves can represent practices staging single or multiple agents doing something. In this case we speak of *representation of practices within images*. This mode of action asks the following questions: What kind of practice is represented in the image? Which (iconographic) conventions are followed or modified to represent practices and agents within the image?

Finally, material images themselves can act as space markers, as in the aforementioned example of the gravestone as a boundary between this world and the hereafter. But also a tree can function as an image that marks a certain space, providing it with a particular meaning rather than another. Then we speak of *images as space marking practices* that methodologically investigate how a specific spatial structure is shaped and characterised by images. Here the questions are: What function does a certain image have in the cemetery space and what is its semiotic position in this particular constellation of images?

In order to analyse these modes of image practices, it is important to place them in relation to the imaginary and consider to what extent they are material manifestations of *reproductive* or *creative* activities. In other words, we have to investigate the dialectical relationship between imaginary and image; imagination is then the name we give to the relationship itself. The performative force of this relationship is ambivalent particularly from a political point of view. In fact, if the reproduction of images, stories and practices tend to legitimise and to reinforce the status quo and the dominant power structures, most of the time the creation of novelty is subversive. This also applies to the iteration of dogmas, rules, moral and aesthetic models, as well as to the reinforcement or subversion of religious

identities and traditions. Therefore, images can express both the continuity and the rupture of religious traditions.

Another mode of practice that expands the above outlined socio-religious practices of images, specifically in the context of a cemetery, are memory practices. A cemetery is an almost exemplary space, where practices of memorialisation are embodied, passed on, changed and transformed. It is also a place where memory can be questioned through subversive images, images that challenge the way to remember the past, perhaps by offering alternative models of memorialisation. Many objects within Highgate Cemetery act as *memorial signs*. What they do is first and foremost to memorialise for example past persons as well as historical events, ideas, feelings, aesthetical forms. Moreover, these memorial signs frame and affect the ways in which past, present and future visitors perceive and experience not only history, but also the inevitability of death, the feeling of loss, the practice of mourning, and many other psychological, cultural and social phenomena. In the case study of Tom Sayer's grave at Highgate the memory practice is further elaborated. *Alexander Darius Ornella's* contribution «Sport as Bodily Practice of Remembrance. Remembering Heroes, Remembering Nations», examines how ritualised practices of sporting activities become the actual instrument through which remembrance is bodily performed.<sup>23</sup>

As outlined so far the constellation of images that we face at Highgate Cemetery is a concrete manifestation of memorialisation practices of different historical times, social strata and cultures. In reference to Jay Winter, we can call these practices *performances of memory*: «The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form.»<sup>24</sup> Although they do so in different ways, all the contributions to the current book deal with material and sensory dimensions of such performances of memory. As Foucault rhetorically asks: «Could one speak of a statement if a voice had not articulated it, if a surface did not bear its signs, if it had not become embodied in a sense-perceptible element, and if it had not left some trace – if only for an instant – in someone's memory or in some space?»<sup>25</sup> The same can be said of the image: its performativity is unthinkable, without

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23 See Alexander Ornella's contribution in this volume.

24 Winter 2010, 12.

25 Foucault 1972, 100.

taking into account its embodiment and manifestation in material objects and its mediation as a concrete act of communication.<sup>26</sup>

*Image, Imagination and Imaginary: Production and Exchange of Meaning*

According to Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of British Cultural Studies, culture «is not so much a set of *things* [...] as a process, a set of *practices*.»<sup>27</sup> Hall does not deny the materiality of culture, on the contrary, he aims to highlight that every cultural product is the material expression of a practice. The same applies to a cemetery as a cultural product that carries meaning. But the objects that we perceive and experience when we visit the cemetery don't provide one single distinct meaning in themselves, they are rather «vehicles or media which *carry meaning* because they operate [...] as *signs*. Signs stand for or *represent* our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to «read», decode or interpret the meaning in roughly the same way that we do.»<sup>28</sup> The exchange of meaning is thus always achieved by the means of media or, to use a metaphor, by *material anchors* of meaning. This is also the case during the tours offered in the western part of the cemetery and events organised by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery as outlined in Marie-Therese Mäder's contribution «Public Events at a Historic-Religious Site. Highgate Cemetery in London as a Cultural Practice». Even though the guided tours and events provide sets of meanings that regulate religious and non-religious references as to how the cemetery should be received and interpreted, the tour participants engage in their own meaning making process, she argues in her ethnographic approach. By doing so the cemetery undergoes reiterated and various interpretations in a regulated setting based on the visitor's personal imaginations.

Just as it is true that the transmission and exchange of meaning is not possible without material anchors, it is equally true that the latter could never occur without imagination. In the last decade, different academic disciplines have (re)discovered the concepts of imagination and imaginary, highlighting their heuristic value for understanding and describing historical, social and cultural processes.<sup>29</sup> Some aspects of the academic discus-

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26 See Hjarvard 2012, 26.

27 Hall 2013, xvii.

28 Hall 2013, xxi.

29 See Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015, 9–38.

sion of these concepts frame our approach to Highgate Cemetery. In this section we highlight five different dimensions of the dialectical relationship between image, imaginary and imagination, which in different ways and to different degrees play an important role in all the chapters published in this volume.

First of all, the ability to imagine as a cognitive function enables human beings to perceive and experience the world's animated and unanimated objects as meaningful things. Imagination is a cognitive operation that produces ideas or, more precisely, mental images or «frames». These frames influence the individual sensory perception like a filter. According to Eva Brann, «this activity of semi-deliberate «seeing as», which falls between straight perception of a simple sensory signal and unconstrained imagining [...], is surely the imagination's most significant work in the world.»<sup>30</sup> This conceptualisation of the cognitive function of imagination is not very distant from that given by Immanuel Kant to the epistemological function of the *Einbildungskraft*, which has been translated into English by the word «imagination».<sup>31</sup>

Secondly and as already touched upon before, the ability to imagine is what enables people to produce novelties, such as creating objects and providing new meanings to existing ones. Without imagination, there could be no history, society and culture. The human ability to produce something new has perhaps been most strongly emphasised by Cornelius Castoriadis, who refers to it as «the radical imaginary.»<sup>32</sup> The radical imaginary creates things – forms of language, paintings, sculptures, music, architecture, etc. – by «bringing into being a form that was not there before.»<sup>33</sup> Castoriadis distinguishes between the radical, which creates the new, and the actual or institutional imaginary, which «provides continuity within society, the production and repetition of the same forms».<sup>34</sup> The dialectical tension between the imaginative creation of new forms, the institutionalisation of imaginaries, and the latter subsequent imaginative subversion through new imaginative practices stands at the core of the dynamics of historical, cultural and social transformation. Within these dialectical processes, the reception, consumption and interpretation of cultural objects play a fundamental role.

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30 Brann 1991, 21.

31 See Kant 1999, 256–259.

32 Castoriadis 1987, 127.

33 Castoriadis 2007, 73.

34 Castoriadis 2007, 73.

As highlighted above, the objects in Highgate Cemetery are material anchors of past beliefs, ideas, mental images and feelings. It is primarily through the production of cultural artefacts that new forms are created or old ones are reproduced, that culture is consolidated or transformed. But without consumption, interpretation, appropriation and subversion of the old, novelty could never emerge. This is what *Anna-Katharina Höpflinger* considers in the chapter «A Top-Hat, a Mad Murderess, a Vampire King. Practices, Imaginations, and the Materiality of Haunted Highgate», namely the imagination's ability to invent haunted narratives in relation to practices and places. By means of the reception of ghosts she differentiates in a diachronic perspective how on the one hand religious traditions influence media representations of haunted places and how on the other hand New Age practices reproduced, adapted and specifically renewed these representations during rituals taking place in the 1960s and 70s at the then abandoned cemeteries.<sup>35</sup>

The third important aspect to be outlined is thus that the imaginative process plays a central role not only in the production of cultural objects, but also in the practice of experiencing and interpreting them. These objects, material anchors of «imaginative things» are themselves triggers of imagination; in this context, one can also speak of *imagination-induction*: «through the most diverse media and sensory impressions that are made possible by them, the imagination process is stimulated and controlled.»<sup>36</sup> A landscape can be just such a «trigger of imagination», as *Alberto Saviello* considers in «Highgate Cemetery's Landscape as a Matrix of Imagination». To cultivate one's imagination was already considered to be a pleasant and beneficial occupation by the British Philosopher Joseph Addison (1712).<sup>37</sup> Addison considered the strong impact that nature and landscapes exerted on the human senses and thus on imagination. By discussing the original landscape design and architectural elements of the western part of the cemetery Saviello argues that the cemetery's layout implied a fancy and extravagant but nevertheless normative semantic frame to stir and guide the visitors' imaginations.<sup>38</sup>

The fourth aspect is the «privileged link between imaginary and image».<sup>39</sup> In contemporary cognitive, media and cultural science, the word *image* is used to refer to both mental images and concrete-material images.

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35 See Anna-Katharina Höpflinger's contribution in this volume.

36 Traut/Wilke 2015, 51 (translation by the authors).

37 See Addison 1803 (1712), 72–73.

38 See Alberto Saviello's contribution in this volume.

39 Pezzoli-Olgiatei 2015, 19.

For the study of cultural imaginaries, this «hybridization of the image concept between mental act [...] and material form» is of great importance.<sup>40</sup> However the contributions published in this book examine very different material phenomena such as tombs, walls, paths, plants, flowers and also moving bodies, and follow diverse interpretative and methodological trajectories. They are based on the assumption that Highgate Cemetery is more than a collection of material objects, but above all the expression and the source of inspiration for mental images. *Niels Penke's* contribution deals with a specific effect of mental images stirred by literary reception. The images of Highgate Cemetery in literature inspire the readers' imagination and in turn influence the perception of the concrete-material Cemetery. He demonstrates in «Tales of the Dead. Narrating Highgate Cemetery between Nostalgia and Heterotopia» how the reception of the actual place of the cemetery is highly influenced by literary images specifically by «social readings», namely when readers share their reading experiences in internet comments.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of the material image, as we use it in connection with the terms of imagination and imaginary, does not exclusively encompass visual phenomena, but also includes active, auditive and haptic perception. For example, *Sean Ryan's* contribution «Simply to thy Cross I cling. Hymns and the Performance of Memory in Victorian Highgate Cemetery» deals with the power of hymns inscribed on tomb stones. Beside moral guidance of a good death in Victorian times the grave monument becomes both script and performer that multiplies the sensual experience of those left behind.<sup>42</sup> The example shows how Highgate Cemetery's cultural artefacts are perceived as «images» through the whole human sensory system.

The fifth and final aspect concerns the performativity of the imaginative process. Performativity is a complex concept used in many different ways in a wide range of research fields. In general, it is used to indicate the active dimension of language, the way in which language *does* something, exerts effects and thus produces changes in the world. The first researcher who drew attention to the performativity of language was John Langshaw Austin in his general theory of speech acts.<sup>43</sup> According to the American philosopher, speech acts are not simply a way to communicate something but a way to *do* something. They actively deploy effects on reality and fac-

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40 Traut/Wilke 2015, 52 (translation by the authors).

41 See Niels Penke's contribution in this volume.

42 See Sean Ryan's contribution in this volume.

43 See Austin 1962.

tuality. Since the publication of Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, the concept of performativity has been discussed, redefined and criticised many times, becoming a *terminus technicus* of many academic disciplines. Within cultural studies, Austin's concept of performativity has been redefined in order to comprehend not only phenomena of spoken (and written) language, but all kinds of materially and medially embodied forms of language. Starting from this redefinition, the contributions published in this book are connected by their effort to answer the following question: What do the objects and the images of Highgate Cemetery do? One common point is that they all, although in different forms and with different intentions, take a stand on death. As *Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati* further differentiates, Highgate Cemetery provides a place where death as the universal and uncontrollable *conditio humana* is staged in material and visual interpretative practices that combine the bodily dimensions of the visitors with spatial practices in the cemetery. In her contribution «Performing Difference in Front of Death. The Gravestone and Material, Bodily and Spatial Practice» she further states that the materiality of the graves affects the visitors and allows them to engage in communication processes about death that demand interpretation.<sup>44</sup> The interpretation of death and the handling of liminality connected to the cemetery's images and their use is undoubtedly located at the core business of religion.

### *Coping with Death and Liminal Experiences*

Death shapes life not only in the sense that it marks the moment of life's end; rather, as the German sociologist Georg Simmel argues, it «colours all its contents». «Every step of life manifests itself not only as a temporal approach to death, but as something which is positively and *a priori* shaped by death, which is a real element of life.»<sup>45</sup> In every moment of life, all living organisms adapt to strategies to stay alive and escape death. Humanity has developed, over hundreds of thousands of years, a whole series of specific strategies, which have sought to reduce the daily dangers to which all species are exposed in their environment – lack of food, aggression by beings of the same or other species, weather changes, diseases – with the goal of prolonging their life span as well as making life more liveable. Humans have succeeded in shaping their environment to be sufficiently safe that

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44 See Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati's contribution in this volume.

45 Simmel 1993, 31 (translation by the authors).



their ability to act is not constantly dominated by the task of escaping death. These strategies have enabled them to devote themselves to cultural practices that transcend efforts to merely survive, such as for example drawing, playing, reading, sculpting, writing and, yes, also burying the dead and building cemeteries. The practice of burying the dead paradigmatically shows that for human beings, unlike all other creatures, death is not simply the end of life that can potentially occur at any moment, but rather a border that shapes life and without which life could not be experienced as meaningful.

Therefore, coping with death can be regarded as the metaphysical task *par excellence* and has often been considered as the true core of religions. Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of religion is based precisely on the idea that human beings, inasmuch as they are aware of themselves and of the world, have invented religion to give meaning to the finiteness of life. Since consciousness has no boundaries and is able to imagine the infinite (and therefore also immortality), humans tend to oppose the idea of finiteness. The Feuerbachian critique of religion is summed up in the belief that «without death, there would be no religion.»<sup>46</sup> Feuerbach, like Marx and Freud, understands religion as a compensation for life's deficiencies, which can be resolved in the course of social-political and intellectual emancipation processes, so that, as they believed, religion would sooner or later disappear.

According to Hermann Lübbe the fault with such theories is that they misjudge the specific cultural significance and function of religion. What Feuerbach and others misunderstood is that religion is the cultural form of the human relationship to those very facts of life that intellectual education, political programmes or emancipation principally cannot deal with.<sup>47</sup> There are certain emotional experiences of fear, suffering, distress, loneliness and loss, but also of happiness, love and contentment, which remain inaccessible, mysterious and inexplicable for enlightened thinking and argumentative reasoning. For modern, «rational» thinking such experiences are contingent, that is, they are related to facts and events that cannot be rationally embraced but happen «by chance». Death is clearly one of these mysterious and inaccessible facts or events of life. The enlightened thought of modernity, in particular natural sciences, can explain why we all die. But in most cases it is unable to explain why we die at a certain time and in a certain way, and is even less able to give meaning to death. This is why, Lübbe argues, we should embrace religion as a «culture of behaviour to the

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46 Feuerbach 1960–1964 (1853), 41.

47 See Lübbe 2004.

unavailable or as a practice of contingency management.»<sup>48</sup> Religion, in other words, is what allows individuals and communities to cope with contingency.

Lübbe's rather abstract and amorphous definition of religion is similar to definitions given by different researchers in the field of social and cultural sciences, which emphasize the intrinsic relationship between religious practices and the experience of death. For example, Peter L. Berger considers religion, and more generally culture, as what enables humans to orient themselves in life and to establish meaningfulness. The desire for meaning is located especially where human beings find themselves on the border of the conceivable, where their experience of the world is destabilised. A person's death as well as the imaginative anticipation of one's own death may be highly unsettling. The radical threshold situation of death leads to the confrontation with chaos. Religion channels these liminal experiences (such as dreams or states of ecstasy or the experience of a beloved one's death) and relates them to everyday life, establishing a connection between exceptional situations and normal situations.

This is exactly how Martin Riesebrodt understands religious practices: they are primarily aimed at preventing or managing risks and dangers. Along with such crises that deal with the control of nature and social relations, he considers the human body: «Fertility and birth, disease and death are central to all religious traditions, where superhuman powers intervene in human existence, fostering or destroying life, punishing or rewarding the human beings.»<sup>49</sup> Above all, according to Riesebrodt, it is through «interventionist practices» such as prayers, songs, gestures, and sacrifices that individuals and groups are able to cope with crises and liminal experiences.

Riesebrodt understands these interventionist practices as symbolic practices. Nonetheless, he distinguishes between primary interventions and secondary language articulations of these interventions: «[...] here, religion is not viewed primarily from the perspective of linguistic articulation of beliefs and religious categories, however important these processes may be, but the social actions of individuals, groups, and institutions relating to imaginary superhuman powers are placed in the centre [...].»<sup>50</sup> Riesebrodt may distinguish and separate these two areas of human activity – linguistic articulation and social practices – because he almost complete-

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48 Lübbe 2004, 150 (translation by the authors).

49 Riesebrodt, 2000, 42 (translation by the authors); see also Riesebrodt 2010, 71–91.

50 Riesebrodt 2000, 42 (translation by the authors).

ly refrains from considering the material and medial dimension of both language and social practices. In fact, as soon as these dimensions are taken into account, one immediately realises that every linguistic signifier is the result of a practice that manifests itself in a medium. In other words: every social practice communicates something by the means of one or more media. Often these media are bodies, but they might also be texts, images, architecture, or any other kind of cultural object.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, although the assertion that religious «interventionist practices» are «the core component of any religion»<sup>52</sup> is not wrong per se, it must be revised by emphasising that religious practices always convey meaning by means of linguistic elements – gestures, sounds, words, clothes, etc. – which are materially communicated. Moreover, we argue that not only strictly cultic acts but also other practices of production and reception of media, in which elements of religious systems of representation play an important role, can serve to cope with liminal experiences and crises. In order to understand how Highgate Cemetery can serve as a site where liminal experiences are enabled, framed and controlled, we must take into consideration the concrete objects and media, the cultural images, as well as the practices with which these objects are produced, used and received. The volume guides its readers through Highgate Cemetery's past and present images, to hopefully provide illuminating insights into a fascinating place and its manifold social-religious practices.

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51 See Pollack/Rosta 2015, 71–72.

52 Riesebrodt 2000, 41 (translation by the authors).

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# I. The Broader Image





# Experiencing Highgate Cemetery as a Place Landscape, Text, Threshold

Carla Danani

## 1. Approaching Highgate

Human beings are always involved in space-time games.<sup>1</sup> They are not in the world in the way things are, because the relationships they have with space and time are intrinsic to their existence and constitute them.<sup>2</sup> As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, «I belong to them [space and time], my body combines with them, and includes them.»<sup>3</sup> For human beings, living is tantamount to perceiving, acting, knowing, feeling and moving by means of a certain hold on space and time which allows them to locate and orientate themselves. They live *in* and live *on* places, with other human and non-human beings. Human experiences are always social-spatial-temporal experiences. The logic of existence is therefore always a topology.

For my research, this means that there is always a «here» *from where* we are asking about Highgate Cemetery and *in which* we are talking about it. This is both a limit for our understanding and its condition of possibility, giving us words, narrations and questions only through which and from which thoughts can develop. Knowledge is always knowledge *of* something, and there are many ways to grasp something through thinking: in any case, we can say that we are always thinking *of* something *from* and *in* somewhere. An act of knowing «lives on» this particular something with which it is dealing, generally speaking just as our existence is also «living on» the world. Therefore, investigations must always be characterized by an *ethical concern* towards these relations and also towards all those links arising from people in their interactions among each other.

Knowledge is a kind of experience and ethics is implied in our search for truth. What are we thinking about when we say «Highgate cemetery»? Whatever we are referring to, the question is *where?* This means that the question is about a place. First of all, dealing with Highgate Cemetery

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1 See Heidegger 2002.

2 See Danani 2014; Danani 2017a.

3 Merleau-Ponty 1962, 162.

means to deal with the experience of a place, a meaningful space.<sup>4</sup> But places are not mere things or objects. Human beings, who can ask about places, have a special relationship with them, for places have physical, social and cultural dimensions. In different ways, they play specific roles in human life and change over time. One can better say that places *happen*, rather than that places are.<sup>5</sup>

How can we understand places and place experiences? I propose here a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. It is fruitful in highlighting the many aspects of places, because it considers the different ways in which things appear in the experiences we have of them: their coming to consciousness, their ways of giving themselves in a series of perceptual processes, their arising from the horizon of the world in which we are involved.<sup>6</sup> Husserl called intentionality the directedness of experience towards something in the world, involving temporality (the stream of consciousness), spatial awareness, attention (distinguishing focal and marginal or «horizontal» awareness), self-consciousness, empathy, intersubjectivity and linguistic activity. Phenomenology points out many subjective, practical and social conditions for the possibility of experience, highlighting embodiment, bodily skills, cultural context, language and other social practices and contextual aspects of intentional activities. Localization (Edmund Husserl says *Lokalität*) is a relevant coordinate in one's perceptual field, independent of the localized perceptual contents and enabling human beings to speak about places.<sup>7</sup> By answering the question *where?*, Highgate

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4 The style of Highgate Cemetery is neo-gothic, it is not just an accurate reproduction of the architecture of the medieval gothic era, but an interpretation especially focused on the decorations of the buildings aimed at recreating the atmosphere typical of the medieval world. See Chandler 1971, 4. In the 19th century the neo-gothic style became an element of tradition and continuity, as well as source of national pride for the English people.

5 See Casey 1996; Danani 2018, 96–97.

6 See Husserl 1994, 268: «Die Weltvorstellung ist nicht eine Vorstellung unter meinen Vorstellungen. Es ist eine universale Bewegung und Synthese in der Bewegung aller meiner Vorstellungen, derart, daß all ihr Vorgestelltes zusammengeht zur Einheit einer Welt als einander geltender, das Korrelat der immerzu werdend gewordenen Einheit aller meiner Vorstellungen – Vorstellungen, die ich habe, hatte und haben werde.» Translation by the author: «The world-representation is not a representation among my representations. It is a universal motion and synthesis in the motion of all my representations, in such a way that all that they represent comes together in the unity of a world that counts for each other, the correlate of the continually developing and developed unity of all my representations – the representations that I have, I had and I will have.»

7 See Husserl, 2001.

Cemetery is experienced as a place and as a complex of localized contents. These contents are «given» and we can find general regularities that are directly graspable in the configuration of what is given.<sup>8</sup> Giovanni Piana says that «the authentic objective of description, *are not by all means givens, but rather rules*; more precisely, rules determining the display of this or that perceptual formation, of this or that objectual formation in general. [...] And this goes hand in hand with the highlighting of nexuses and functional relations, of the modes of articulation, of reciprocal determinations.»<sup>9</sup>

Human beings, however, understand what is given to them only through words, concepts, images, languages and practices through which they find and build the world they dwell in: the structures of experience are interpretative ones.

Focusing on some experiences one can have of Highgate Cemetery, and trying to highlight what appears in them, one can start only with those tools which are in one's toolbox. They change, and meanings change with them, even if they always refer to something that is given in its articulation, and not simply created by them. This does not mean that «anything goes» because some meanings are inappropriate and are «dead ends» (*sensi vietati*).<sup>10</sup> Even if people can *use* a meaning, they always have to highlight the structure of its elements and to respect its cultural, social, and historical context if the goal is to *interpret* it.<sup>11</sup>

The effort to grasp what is given within one's experience is endless. In any case, by experiencing Highgate Cemetery as a place and thinking in depth on its localized contents, I think that one can grasp their nexuses and functional relations, modes of articulation and reciprocal determinations by speaking of Highgate as a landscape, as a text and as a threshold.

## 2. *Highgate as a Landscape*

People tend to perceive «landscape» as nature modified by human beings during a lengthy period of history,<sup>12</sup> the totality of the signs characterizing a more or less wide part of the earth's surface which distinguish it from

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8 See Piana, 2016, 202.

9 Piana 2016, 201.

10 Eco 2000, 54.

11 Eco 1990, 111.

12 See *European Landscape Convention*, Florence 2000: «Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors» (art. 1); «landscape...as an essential component of

other parts. These signs are marks of natural forces (*natural landscape*) and human work (*cultural landscape*). A landscape takes on the trends and characteristics of the social groups that shaped it; it is a living and changing reality which involves naturalistic, cultural, aesthetic and ethical aspects. Highgate Cemetery «gives» itself as a landscape manifesting itself as a part of a territory, of a hill that nowadays is a district in London.

A landscape is not an environment. A landscape is its *form*,<sup>13</sup> in which there is a simultaneous presence of past and present (it has a double contemporaneity).<sup>14</sup> Human beings live surrounded by their environment, which contains the conditions for life and reproduction of life, such as specific weather, climate, soil and all the physicochemical and biological characteristics useful for life. We can speak of a social and economic environment, too. Compared to it, a landscape is rather its specific and perceivable unity, the unique complexity of its structures and relations,<sup>15</sup> of the morphological features which have their historical origins in climatic and generally natural aspects, but also in social relations, legal institutions and technologies.

Highgate Cemetery is a sepulchral landscape, because it is a place where the dead are buried and its form is shaped by many graves and tomb ornaments. Human beings do not build cemeteries in every time period. Even when they buried the dead, they did not always do so in graves and not always in a group of graves. We do not speak about a cemetery when we have only one grave. It appears in our experience as an organized group of graves with its specific form and frame. The etymology of the word «cemetery» comes from the Latin *coemeterium*, which in turn derives from the Greek *koimētērion*, which means place of «rest», «dormitory». This name was originally given to the portico for pilgrims. It is only with the spread of Christianity that «cemetery» takes on the value of *necropolis* and burial ground: «The Church, which embraced believers when they were alive, becomes the guardian of their sleeping remains. Hence the cemetery - neologism invented by Christians - as a possibility for everyone to have a common dormitory in the light of the common awakening. And whereas pagans preferred to call it *necropolis* [which means «the city of the dead»],

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people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity» (art. 5).

13 Venturi Ferriolo 2003, 143 referring to Rosario Assunto's distinctions between territory, environment, and landscape (see Assunto 1976, 45–48).

14 Venturi Ferriolo 2003, 149 (referring to Lorca 1993, 132).

15 Venturi Ferriolo 2003, 132.

Christians have always considered it the place of the sleep waiting for the resurrection.»<sup>16</sup>

Many monumental architectural works of the past exhibit cemeteries and tombs as something to glorify events and leaders and offer a specific representation of history. Many cemeteries were places where human beings disappeared into the framework of a civil and public death. In the modern world sepulchral landscapes become, perhaps, more «democratic», and it seems that a kind of immortality can concern everyone.

The way a sepulchral landscape is considered depends on the way death is considered. If death is something marginalized, then the cemetery becomes the archetype of all ghettos; if death is understood as a passage, it becomes a place which refers to the possibility of an afterlife. A city of the dead or a place for lasting sleep, in such a landscape death becomes prominent, and somehow takes on meaning.

Manufactured by the living and relying on the living, the elements of a cemetery express the relationship between human beings and death. This is not a mere biological fact, but a complex cultural event. These elements are functional but at the same time meaningful, and include many symbolic features. They shape an aesthetic and ethical form, as well: in the specific characteristics of this place one perceives its normativity for behaviour, because it is a rather extra-ordinary place.

Death is deemed to be a leveller of the hierarchies and differences that characterize everyday life and distinguish between people. Nevertheless, does a sepulchral landscape really tell us about equality between people? The rituals that mark times of life and death are social factors which build a community and by which a community recognizes itself as such. Often differences are rebuilt in a cemetery, and it becomes relevant *who* is buried there, more than the fact that a human being is buried there. The very importance of a grave can derive from the social role that an individual had in that society, rather than from their dignity as human beings. Therefore, we can say that cemeteries are mirrors of the communities of the living and are places that tell about the rules of inclusion and exclusion, about the social, cultural and religious divisions that are working in the city of the living. In this sense, they are more places of the living than of the dead.

On the one hand, death creates solidarity among people, but it does this by reminding them that it is an extremely and solely personal possibility, since nobody can die in the place of another person. This states a common

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16 Di Molfetta 2006, 747.

fate, but at the same time claims consideration for the singularity of each person, implying that we are different from each other.

Vitruvius said that architecture must last in time. This idea is stressed by the sepulchral landscape. In order to speak about Highgate Cemetery, we need to place it in the specific time when it was founded, but this historical time informs us about only a few aspects. Spatial forms have the power to make visible what the past leaves behind.<sup>17</sup> Architecture and spatial configurations are sets of temporal relations: they allow us to perceive and experience the many links that cannot be reduced to any present.<sup>18</sup>

If every place holds time in space, more than most other places, a cemetery has the vocation to last over generations.<sup>19</sup> It is a landscape telling us that all is not finished, whether it be on earth or even in the «netherworld». In this sense one can say that a cemetery uses death against death. Whilst 40 years after individuals die there will be few people who were personally acquainted with them alive to remember them, a cemetery will continue to be a legible story about them, as long as stones, columns or statues survive. We can ask about the «truth» of this story, observing that every kind of memorial is a specific portrayal of the deceased by those who survive – the dead do not bury themselves.<sup>20</sup> In these ways cemeteries tell us more about life than death.

In Highgate Cemetery the long-rotation plants, the evergreen trees resisting seasons and years refer to persistence (fig. 1), whilst the short-rotation vegetation creates an atmosphere expressing the idea of life renewing (fig. 2). The return to ancient Egypt and the use of geometric forms tell of the possibility of abiding over time. The tombs paradoxically refer to death by representing immortality. One can read it in many images of angels but also in many columns or statues that must remain forever.

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17 See Ferrari 2007, 44.

18 Deleuze 1986, 270 (Deleuze talks about images).

19 See Schlögel 2003.

20 See Parker Pearson 1999.



*Fig. 1: Long-rotation evergreen, Cedar of Lebanon (Image: Carla Danani 2017).*



*Fig. 2: Short-rotation vegetation (Image: Carla Danani 2017).*

Like every landscape, Highgate can be experienced in different ways: a haptic perception<sup>21</sup> is different from an optic look, for example. We call optic a kind of look arising from an external point of view, but able to catch the overall frame of a place. We call haptic a kind of complex perception in which sensory, motion and cognitive systems all work together; it focuses on things giving the observer tactile, immersive effects.<sup>22</sup> Haptic percep-

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21 Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 493: they quote Alois Riegl, along with Wilhelm Worringer and Henri Maldiney, as the artists who gave fundamental aesthetic status to the relation between close range vision and haptic spaces.

22 Gibson defined the haptic system as «The sensibility of the individual to the world adjacent to his body by use of his body». Gibson and others emphasized the close link between haptic perception and body movement: haptic perception is active exploration. See Gibson 1966. See also Pallasmaa 1994, 35: «We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence and the experiential world is organized and articulated around the center of the body»; see also Holl/Pallasmaa/Pérez-Gómez 1994, 36 and Mallgrave 2010, 189: «I would like

tion is something more than a localized tactile one:<sup>23</sup> it is a bodily perception, *haptein* signifies a kind of vision that «grabs» the things it looks at.

Among the elements characterizing Highgate Cemetery as a sepulchral landscape there are many paths (main and secondary ones), which organize the space, the vegetation and the tombs. Highgate Cemetery as a landscape offers itself for a journey experience. One can start from somewhere in the city or from another country, arrive at the cemetery and then go into it. This journey can happen through a series of partial disjunctions (to leave home, to leave the neighbourhood, to leave the main street...) and partial conjunctions (to reach the foot of the hill, to take the climb to the cemetery, to pass the gate, to walk along the paths...) that follow one another. The movement can be performed in different ways: it is possible to go directly to a specific site or to be interested in wandering, having no definite point to reach, one can follow the signals or avoid them for creating one's own path. The pursued goal can be a certain tomb, the Lebanon cedar, but also the sepulchral landscape itself. It is reached thanks to many conditions and through different transformations, by means of separations and unions following and intertwining with one another and giving to the experience of movement a narrative structure. The manner in which one connects places by walking paths is an oriented process marked by a certain rhythm. An «organization of the territory and a syntax of the vision» link space and time and cooperate to shape the experience.<sup>24</sup> An itinerary is a discursive series of actions, it is spatial practice and narration which describes. But each description has a performative force.<sup>25</sup> Not only does it reproduce what is visible; it also makes it somehow visible. Each description opens up in a different way the landscape it describes and this makes different openings of the world.<sup>26</sup> Michel De Certeau discusses two different kinds of description: map-type and tour-type. While the first one refers to the objective relative positions among elements, the second one implies one's body moving through the described places.<sup>27</sup> Along the path some

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to use the term as a synonym for the emotive and multisensory experience of architecture, which includes the visual dimension.»

23 See Gibson 1966.

24 See Fabbri 1998.

25 De Certeau 1988, 123.

26 Another theory distinguishes three types of description: as based on seeing, or based on speaking, or based on doing; see Hammon 1981.

27 De Certeau 1988, 118–122: «The question ultimately concerns the basis of the everyday narrations, the relation between the itinerary (a discursive series of opera-



transformations can happen. In this way we can say that people *live on* a landscape.

When Michel Foucault speaks about a cemetery, for example, he names it a heterotopic landscape,<sup>28</sup> describing it as a concrete place, somehow isolated from the rest. This place reproduces the real world but at the same time re-invents it by bringing the subject into an alienating dimension and questioning the usual relationships between the subject and its world. It works also as a heterochrony, problematizing the relationship between the human being and time. On the one hand, a cemetery aims to keep memory alive, tending to a cyclic continuity; on the other, it affirms a discontinuous continuity with the normal time of life characterized by one's own activities which change quickly one after the other, and produces a sort of steadiness. It works by decentralizing one from the usual way of experiencing time and provides an opportunity for a new image of the world.

### *3. Highgate Cemetery as a Text*

Many elements of Highgate Cemetery make it possible to experience it as a text with its contents and its forms, main and secondary characters. Like all texts, it has a beginning and an end that need to be identified, but also to be established. Where does Highgate start and finish? Is the street dividing the east side of the cemetery from the west side part of Highgate Cemetery? And what about the road to get there? And the hill on which the graves are located? Such questions about its boundaries also involve questions about its context, and this refers not only to the many relationships with the neighbourhood but also with other Victorian cemeteries.

There is a kind of coherence between all the elements that makes it possible to recognize this place as the one called Highgate Cemetery. This coherence does not arise as fixed and static, but as something dynamic and stratified. It is shaped by the space organization, the use of certain materials and images, the presence of some natural elements, the repetition of certain architectural forms that express and strengthen the social and cultural heritage. Distances and mutual positions of the tombs mark relation-

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tions) and the map (a plane projection totalizing observations), that is, between two symbolic and anthropological languages of space», the first is the type «you turn right and come into the living room» (how to enter each room) and organizes movements, the second is the type «the girl's room is next to the kitchen» (the knowledge of an order of places) and is based on seeing.

28 Foucault 1986, 25.

ships, hierarchies, and suggest orders of importance among the elements composing the place.

This text has some subtexts: this means that one has to recognize many authors and many readers. There are elements that allow the discovery of their enunciator (author) and listener/reader (receiver).<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, the communicative pact between them depends on the specific kind of text a cemetery is, for it is a place but it is not a hospital or a school. On the other, the pact depends on the specific ways in which the exchanges can happen. They can be, for example, more or less intense from an emotional point of view. In the case of cemeteries, the fact of lasting in time complicates and multiplies these relationships, but many signals give instructions on how to manage the text. It is important to pay attention to different architectural typologies, to titles and epigraphs, to symbolic and decorative elements (fig. 3).<sup>30</sup> In Highgate there are artefacts with effects designed to convey representational meanings - for example a tomb with a curled-up dog (fig. 4), graves with angels (fig. 5) - and others with a marked constructive function,<sup>31</sup> for example stairs and narrow passages (fig. 6). Some of these are «mythical buildings». By this, I mean buildings that allow the viewer to go beyond their function and to understand more than what is explicit.



Fig. 3: *Symbolic and decorative elements (Image: Carla Danani 2017).*

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29 See Martin/Ringham 2000, 28, 58, 82, 108.

30 See the contribution of Sean Ryan in this volume.

31 We speak of 1) representational meaning effect when the spatial element brings in itself elements of the external world; 2) constructive meaning effect when what is spoken about is built through and in the spatial element. See Floch 2002.



*Fig. 4: Grave of Thomas Sayers, with sculpture of his dog, Lion (Image: Carla Danani 2017).*

*Fig. 5: Angel symbolism (Image: Carla Danani 2017).*

*Fig. 6: Stairs and passageways (Image: Carla Danani 2017).*

Even if every project defines its own ideal user, there is no direct correspondence either between the meaning of a text and the intentions of its authors, nor between the effectivity of a place and the plans of its designers. Furthermore, each configuration follows many refigurations.<sup>32</sup>

One must not believe that specific spatial articulations automatically produce certain effects. Moreover, it is a matter of certain symbolic efficacy of place: there is no relationship of cause and effect but one of significance, that is, a relationship of mutual reference between the level of configuration and the one of meaning.<sup>33</sup> The symbolic efficacy of a cemetery arises from the relationships between people, spatial configurations, natural and material elements, inscriptions and images. It works and performs at many levels: at a somatic level, through sounds and combinations of materials

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32 See Ricoeur 2016, 39: «From now on it is time to talk of inhabiting as a response, even as an answer to building, on the model of the agonistic act of reading, because it will not suffice for an architectural project to be well thought-out, or even for it to be held to be rational for it to be understood and accepted. All planners ought to learn that an abyss can separate the rules of the rationality of a project – that is true for all politics, moreover – from the rules of acceptability to a public. We must therefore learn to consider the act of inhabiting as a focus not only of needs, but of expectations. And the same palette of responses as earlier can be travelled, from passive reception, subdued, indifferent reception, to hostile and angry reception – even that of the Eiffel Tower in its day!».

33 See Giannitrapani 2013, 70.

and odours, which activate the sentient body; at a pragmatic level, through the play of openings and closures, ups and downs, main and secondary paths; at a cognitive level, giving information about dates, parents, social positions, jobs of the deceased, by which a transformation of previous knowledge occurs; at an emotional level, through many elements such as size, light, density and proportions, which bring on affective reactions. A place can also have an «effect of resonance»,<sup>34</sup> when an emotional and pragmatic behaviour is transmitted among many people involving them and producing a unitary feeling.

All relationships happen in time and through many contexts and one cannot have a mechanical rule for understanding them. People constantly rearticulate the places they are in, confirming meanings and values or using tactical behaviour that re-invents new ones.<sup>35</sup> Practices can give new contents to places, through unexpected uses which sometimes become habits: there may be a time, for instance, when a cemetery somewhere begins to be used as a picnic area.

What a place is, therefore, is not firmly fixed once and for all.<sup>36</sup> It is a text that undergoes endless refigurations resulting from many practices and their stratifications, diachronic and synchronic intersections of different readers: of many dwellers who live in it and on it, who have to do with it. Sometimes all this leads to a multiplicity of different, maybe conflicting narrations. Lotman suggests one may speak of a polylogue:<sup>37</sup> where different instances interweave.

#### 4. *Highgate as a Threshold*

People can experience a sepulchral landscape as a threshold, because different spheres have contact and meet or clash in this «third place».<sup>38</sup> Thresh-

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34 See Thom 1968.

35 De Certeau 1988, 38: «Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favourable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc.».

36 See Massey/Jess 1995.

37 See Lotman 1987: A polylogue is more complex than a dialogue, since different discourses, semiotic conflicts and relations weave together, escaping a unique or a bi-unique logic.

38 Agamben 2007, 75: Profanation is a way of eliminating the separation.

olds may be considered passing devices that modify those who cross them. They work like crossing lines, making it possible to pass from one side to the other. But it is also possible to stand on a threshold, and use it as such. This means that one remains within the tension created by the relationship between what the threshold indicates as something close and what it indicates as something connected while keeping it separate. If someone crosses a threshold, one is no longer on it.

Delimitations avoid confusion and define each part only as a part, as a not-whole. If borders seem to have mostly a demarcating function, as they distinguish the inside from the outside, thresholds show a segmentative function: they introduce articulations.<sup>39</sup> This means that a threshold not only separates but connects, not only distinguishes but bridges, and points one to consider the many elements in their relationship more than just their consistency. The concepts of continuous and discontinuous, with their associated steps, may be relevant not only to understand the sepulchral landscape in relation to other places, but also its internal configuration, paying attention to the functions of ruptures, connections, crossing passages.

By working as a place where separation and contact occur, a threshold is *per se* a producer of spatial forms and behaviours. Transition areas are always places of negotiations, where rites, cults and practices, possibilities of exchanges, of transformations, of new semantics occur. These places cannot be considered internal or external, owned or belonging to others. They are intermediary spaces, unstable and open to many possible meanings. Control and practices of power are often introduced, aiming to set up some authority over them.

The binding power of a threshold, which connects by separating and separates by connecting, refers to the spheres it puts in contact. About the sepulchral landscape, one can experience that here almost all life and death, past and present, public and private realms connect. Death and life seem to deny each other, but we cannot really say that one has nothing to do with the other. Death is an unwanted but not an abusive guest in our life.<sup>40</sup>

A cemetery is a town of the dead, who are hosted here in several buildings, tombs and graves. They recall the event of their death, which is often explicitly referred to as premature, painful or heroic. But these buildings also recall their life, with their commitments and traits. The life of the

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39 Zilberberg 1993, 394.

40 Danani 2017b; the expression is from Alici 2016.

dead – which has come to an end - is the object of epitaphs, statues and symbols. Moreover, cemeteries are places where people bring the dead, they are obviously built and visited by the living, and tombs are erected to make people remember. This can be understood as a sort of persistence after death. One cannot say that a cemetery is the place of life beyond death: because saying this would mean to believe in a real victory *over* death, a different form of life that is not experienced here in this world. Instead for those who do not believe in an afterlife, death is nothing more than the end of life.

In cemeteries, that event of *no longer having time*, that is death, takes spatial shape. However, this happens through the forms built over time by those who still have time. Every cemetery gives human beings this challenge of lingering on a threshold where one may experience the «architectural possibility» of recounting death, the boundary after which no time, no landscape nor architecture exists. Every tomb and every grave appears as keeper of the mystery of death, which cannot be separated from life. In this way Karsten Harries talks about tombs and monuments as *boundary markers*.<sup>41</sup>

The different architectural styles, the spatial organisations of graves and the monuments tell of people's relation to death, to the dead and to other living beings. Christianity, for example, has interpreted death as defeated by eternal life thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus. The image of the cross indeed celebrates the victory over death by means of death.

Highgate Cemetery appears extremely classical but Romantic, too. It is majestic and many of its tombs are monuments with statues in Greek, Egyptian or Byzantine style: the main part of the West Cemetery develops along an Egyptian Avenue and around the Circle of Lebanon, surrounded by catacombs and having the famous Lebanon cedar at its centre. It is characterized by Classicism and by Gothic style, marked by the tension between finitude and infinity, suggesting a dimension of immortality without avoiding earthly life, but reconciling with it. People walking in Highgate Cemetery perceive a sense of mystery, but nothing is terrible here.

A cemetery *is* and *is not* a place of «this life», just as it *is* and *is not* a place of death. It works as a threshold between life and death. A cemetery works as a threshold between the public and private sphere, as well. Death marks the existence of human beings all over the world. One can understand the cemetery as a public space also because death concerns all people, making them equal in it: for the dead differences do not count anymore. However,

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41 Harries 1998, 299.

the living continue to experience differences, even if death can transform the perception of them. The cemetery - the landscape housing the dead - has always been a common place, a place of the community, with its own legal and moral framework, which falls within social and cultural practices. There can be private tombs, but the cemetery itself - even if reserved for the few and not a site for all the dead - is never a private place. It is an institution for all people, even when it celebrates the *epos* of a few. Independently of the face-to-face relationships or of the relationships among those bounded by ties, feelings, pacts and laws, everyone deserves to be buried and the sepulchral landscape houses the dead of the past and will house those of the future. The fact of being an institution that potentially concerns and includes everyone (even if treated differently) and the fact that a cemetery houses those who build the community make this place an eminent public space. Through the sepulchral landscape, the public space connects the space of the living, the city and the dead. Robert Jan van Pelt highlights that the *necropolis* in ancient Athens was located outside the city but just opposite the west gate, the most important one.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that the *necropolis* is to be understood as «the moral and pragmatic foundation of the public realm»,<sup>43</sup> because it is not just the place where everyone can remember one's own ancestors but the place of all those who contributed to the existence of the city, which is what one has to take care of, if one wants to take care of oneself. Van Pelt refers to the speech of Pericles and to the death of the heroes in the Peloponnesian War, who died for their homeland.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, he mentions the epitaph on the column in their honour: they were heroes ready to die, going beyond their interests and therefore triumphing over death.

The sepulchral landscape is a very particular public space: it is a place of silence and immobility, which contrasts with other urban public spaces. If they are usually characterized by outward exteriority and sometimes by formalities, in cemeteries one lives almost always a more intimate experience

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42 In the Roman cities the tombs of the famous citizens were clearly visible. With the rise of the Christian city, the tombs were increasingly located in the churches or near them. In 1804 Napoleon decreed that cemeteries be built at a distance of at least 35/40 metres from the city's borders, and a similar law was decided in the British islands around 50 years later. The new European cemeteries owe their existence to a secular initiative rather than to a religious one and they were under municipal jurisdiction rather than under the local clerical one.

43 Van Pelt 1991, 193.

44 Van Pelt 1991, 187.

within oneself and towards other people.<sup>45</sup> The sepulchral landscape is characterized by an *atmosphere* of «common» ground and of shared humanity, as well as by a *mood* of interrupted very personal connections.<sup>46</sup> In the public space everyone is «the third» for all the others, in a sort of fundamentally egalitarian isonomy, because public space is the place that connects people going beyond the face to face encounter, here everyone can express himself or herself as equal to others. However, death is a really personal, intimate experience. At any given moment someone dies on the earth, but the death of a beloved person suspends everything and is the loss of a world. This day marks a turning point, and life will never be the same as before. Giving itself as public landscape and also as private place, the cemetery performs as a threshold: where the tension between different spheres relates and settles.

The cemetery also involves a time dimension, where past and present connect. The gravestones recount universal continuity: they bring the past into the present to make it last, meaning memorialization and giving existence to what is no longer living.

These places are powerful imagination shifters, in which people find suggestions to remember the life of the dead, to travel in biographies, to go beyond one's own finitude. This performance as a threshold between past and present works in many ways. It has a *factual* ground: for example, due to the fact that people of a certain era are buried there and that their tombs have a particular architectural style, they are still visited and renewed or are in ruins. It has a *cultural iconographic* dimension, linked also to some rituals: for example some tombs have a monument in the shape of an angel<sup>47</sup> or a broken column, others have crosses symbolizing religious beliefs, flowers<sup>48</sup> or votive lights suggesting that life is somehow continuing. It has an *affective and pathos* dimension: the statue of a suffering dog on a tomb creates empathy towards a loss, a farewell poem inspires nostalgia for what

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45 See Thiolliere 2014.

46 About atmosphere see Böhme 2006 and Pallasmaa 2014. I distinguish *atmosphere* from *mood*, because one can say that there is a funny atmosphere (which is very different from a mourning one), but that he/she is in a bad mood (which is different from a good one). The atmospheric perception is a holistic and emotional being-in-the world in which the pole of the world prevails; the mood is an emotional being-in-the world highlighting the pole of the embodied consciousness. Atmosphere is the way of being of a place considered in its relationship with the feelings and reactions of the people, mood is the way of being of a human being, considered in his/her relationship with place.

47 See the contribution of Fritz in this volume.

48 See the contributions of Ryan and Wyss-Giacosa in this volume.



now can no longer be or has been lost.<sup>49</sup> It has a *social-political* dimension: a tomb can exhibit the tools of a specific job and celebrate over time its social relevance, another sepulchre is very big, fenced in and located at the point where the main path splits, honouring permanently an important public role.

### *5. Place as Event*

As laid out in this hermeneutic-phenomenological research I understand Highgate Cemetery as a place, which happens as a sepulchral landscape, as a text, as a threshold between life and death, present and past, private and public sphere. The location, forms, proportions and structure of the graves express power relations, social and cultural meanings that today perhaps have, or perhaps no longer have, current legitimations.

The media for this performance of the elements of the sepulchral place are imagination and memory, which enable its symbolic efficacy through significant relationships. Writings, pictures, decorations, statues, forms and frames are some elements where memory works, laboratories where memory is called and experienced, where it intertwines with remembering and gives itself to the present.<sup>50</sup> Highgate Cemetery can be experienced as a landscape, a text and a threshold by means of its many elements and its frame, and one can highlight the threshold performance working through landscape and textual features. This place happens as a transformation offer: because a threshold is a point for discontinuity and a tool for novelties; it exists as a «trans-passing» function. Highgate Cemetery happens as a possibility to understand the form of the environment, for reading a meaning, for experiencing a condition of liminality outside of the usual everyday routine.

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49 See the contribution of Ornella in this volume.

50 See Nora 1984, 8.

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# Performing Difference in Front of Death Material, Bodily and Spatial Practice

*Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati*

«No city is more inclined than Eusapia to enjoy life and flee care. And to make the leap from life to death less abrupt, the inhabitants have constructed an identical copy of their city, underground. All corpses, dried in such a way that the skeleton remains sheathed in yellow skin, are carried down there, to continue their former activities. [...] To be sure, many of the living want a fate after death different from their lot in life: the necropolis is crowded with big-game hunters, mezzosopranos, bankers, violinists, duchesses, courtesans, generals—more than the living city ever contained.»<sup>1</sup>

In Highgate Cemetery, as is so typical of the Victorian cemetery, social history and a tangle of individual destinies merge.<sup>2</sup> Enclosed within walls and fences, graves from two centuries bear witness to people, societies, ideas, and expectations. Some graves are highly visible, located in a prominent place and carefully restored; the stories they tell are known. In other cases, the tombs are silent, overgrown with thick vegetation. Yet although hushed, they are still a presence. Visiting Highgate Cemetery today, one is aware of the sediments of time upon the tombs and their dead. Finding an adequate approach to the richness of this site within an academic reflection is a challenge. How can we unravel the many layers of practices and stories concentrated in such a meaningful place?

## *1. Walking through a Victorian Cemetery Today*

In response to this complexity, I propose we explore Highgate Cemetery by taking a walk during which we observe selected memorials and places in both the western and eastern sections. Inspired by key concepts in the

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1 Calvino 1974, 199.

2 I wish to express my gratitude to Rona Jonston and Sean Ryan for their help (and patience!) in proofreading this contribution.

study of religion, this guided tour through the cemetery aims to contribute to the general theme of this volume, the performativity of images.

As places dedicated to the dead, cemeteries are nodes of social and individual transformation. Through the history of European cultures, spaces dedicated to the dead have undergone radical changes.<sup>3</sup> Considered within the history of religion, cemeteries are quite recent. Victorian cemeteries represent a particular phase in the social handling of the dead that mirrors a general development in European cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They mark the beginning of delimited, representative public places on the margins of urban settlements. In an era of demographic expansion, and correspondingly greater numbers of deceased, cities faced new challenges.

Several issues contributed to the creation of joint stock companies that brought together knowledge of architecture, landscaping, technological innovation and business acumen to offer a way to bury and remember the dead.<sup>4</sup> First, space was lacking for additional corpses to be buried in the packed ground around parish churches in growing cities such as London. Furthermore, discussion had turned to hygienic measures and a possible relationship between overcrowded burial grounds and epidemics. In particular, general concerns were focused on the «miasma» in parish graveyards and the inauspicious effects it was believed to have on the living population.<sup>5</sup> In addition, advances in the medical sciences were a product of dissection and academic study that encouraged the stealing of human corpses, or, as it was known at the time, «body snatching».

A final factor was the rigid regulation of burial ceremonies, which were performed only according to the rites of the Church of England. Although they made up a significant part of the London population, Non-conformists were denied a burial place in the Church of England graveyards and their own funerary rituals. In an increasingly diverse society that limitation led to widespread dissatisfaction.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the cemetery companies had a ready market for their wonderful garden landscapes, which were associated with the opportunity to organise burials according to individual convictions, whatever form of Protestantism or religious communi-

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3 On this transformation see, for example, Curl 1972; Ahn/Emling/Graf 2011.

4 For an introduction see Rugg 2007; Barker/Gay 1984; Barnard 1990; Rutherford 2008.

5 See Happe 2003.

6 According to Rutherford 2008, 13–23, the religious motives were decisive for creating the new garden cemeteries in England. See also Rugg 2007, 46, and the contribution “The Politics of Death” by Ann Jeffers in this book.

ty the deceased had been associated with, and even with or without religious ritual.<sup>7</sup>

Highgate Cemetery was opened on 20 May 1839, the third of the cemeteries that would compose the Magnificent Seven, after Kensal Green (1833) and West Norwood (1837).<sup>8</sup> It belongs among the most impressive of the enterprises of the London cemetery companies. The site was designed to astonish its demanding customers, offering exclusive burial places with names such as the Egyptian Avenue and the Circle of Lebanon. In 1852 the eastern section was opened to enlarge the cemetery and accommodate demand.<sup>9</sup>

More than 170,000 persons are buried in Highgate Cemetery.<sup>10</sup> In the somewhat less than 200 years of its history, the cemetery has changed greatly, mirroring social transformations in dealing with the dead and death. Once materially magnificent and socially prestigious, by the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the West Cemetery had become a place of decay and abandon, rescued only through the enormous efforts of civic organisations, above all the Friends of Highgate Cemetery. Still an active burial ground, the cemetery today allows visitors to experience a revealing chapter of the history of London, either by viewing the tombs of famous individuals or by walking through such an extraordinary site, so often quoted in literature and film, or perhaps by exploring its lush gardens where rare plants and animal species can be found. Diachronic transformations and historical multi-layeredness belong intrinsically to Highgate Cemetery.

From a sociological point of view, the cemetery represents, on the one hand, a social ending. The individual has ceased active membership of society and his or her corpse is now representative of death. In this sense, the cemetery is the terminal station of social and individual interactions. On the other hand, however, the cemetery constitutes a different form of community: it brings together and preserves the dead within a post-mortem society that is more whole and better defined than complex modern societies of the living, where communitization is often fragmented and incomplete.<sup>11</sup>

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7 See Sayer 2011.

8 This number is to be understood as largely symbolic since there are more than seven London cemeteries of interest for this time period. See as a guide to the sites Beach 2013; Philpot 2013.

9 See Meller 1994, 153–171.

10 See Bulmer 2014, 8.

11 See Benkel 2012, 87–92, particularly 89; see also Fischer 1996 and Fischer/Herzog 2005.

This double aspect of a cemetery is particularly telling for the present investigation. This textual guided tour invites the reader to look at Highgate Cemetery as a place where diversity is made visible within a paradox: in a place of memorialization of the deceased, each grave is unique and particular, yet the cemetery as a whole is where the post-mortem community is dwelling and recalled. Now all equal, the dead remind us that mortality is the irrefutable constant of the human condition. The path we will follow leads to selected graves that are then discussed in light of crucial aspects of images as socio-religious practices: the performativity of materiality, the performativity of bodies and the performativity of places, all aspects of visual performativity.

## *2. Materiality at Work*

Our tour begins with a general view of graves in the eastern part of the cemetery (fig. 1). Immediately the variety in styles of memorial is evident; crosses, angels, and simply formed gravestones with or without decoration. They also appear to have been erected at different times. Despite all of these differences, they share one fundamental trait: all are made of solid material and therefore all have a strong plastic presence in the landscape of the cemetery.

The grave materialises a presence that is ambiguous. The person remembered by the grave is dead, absent, yet the very material presence of the tomb marks the dead body and recalls the person as formerly a living member of a family and of a social group. By means of its materiality, the grave locates the dead body as well as the memory of the deceased individual, of that person's life and relationships.

The tomb marks a threshold between the presence of the corpse and the absence of the living person.<sup>12</sup> As we analyse a memorial as a material artefact, the link to an anthropological concept of the image can be illuminating.<sup>13</sup> The image is then understood as the result of a complex relationship between the visually perceived artefact (in our case the grave), the mental images it evokes (for instance, the memory of the deceased or the general

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12 Macho highlights the significance of material representations of the dead in the history of culture and particularly of art. Citing Paul Ludwig Landsberg, he writes, «The status of the dead person is paradoxical. He embodies the presence of someone who is absent. It is not death that [...] is «present for us in absence» but the deceased, the corpse.» (Macho 2000, 99, translation by the author).

13 Belting 2011.





Fig. 1: *Graves in the East Cemetery (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgianti 2018).*

idea of mortality as *the* human destiny)<sup>14</sup> and the bodies encapsulated in its materiality (the dead body, the imagined living person and, of course, the visitor.) The materiality of the tombs marks this relationship, articulating the tension between presence and absence, between visible and invisible, and between the immanent spatial dimension within the cemetery and the transcendent dimension of the realm of mental images, concepts or religious orientation. The performativity of a grave has to do with communication processes by means of materiality that arise whenever somebody looks at the artefact and connects the memorial with mental images,

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14 Macho 2000, 93, is critical of the universalisation of death: «[T]he anthropological universalisation of death usually presupposes an operation whose legitimacy is suspect: it identifies the concept of death with the concept of mortality» (translation by the author). I hold that death can be seen as an anthropological constant, an issue with which societies have to deal because human beings as biological organisms are mortal. From an emic perspective, in the European context of the 19th century and still today, death was and is universalised as a general phenomenon for the human being and the individual. This can be seen for instance in the various visual representations of death as a skeletal figure waiting for new victims. For a comparative overview of approaches to death in the history of religions and cultures see van Barloewen 2000.

concepts, ideas and expectations by means of that gaze. The articulation of that potential communication depends on the nature of the grave.



*Fig. 2: Grave of Isabella (Belle) McKendrick and Arthur Care, East Cemetery  
(Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).*

I deepen this approach by considering the tomb reproduced in fig. 2. An angel is accompanying a woman towards heaven. The floating clothes of both figures suggest that they are flying through the air. The epitaph identifies the woman:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
ISABELLA M<sup>C</sup>KENDRICK (BELLE)  
THE BELOVED WIFE  
OF ARTHUR CARE  
FELL ASLEEP AUG. 8<sup>th</sup> 1925.  
AGED 59.

*NOT GOODBYE  
BUT IN SOME HAPPIER CLIME  
BID US GOOD MORROW*

AND OF ARTHUR CARE  
WHO PASSED AWAY  
ON MAY 23<sup>rd</sup> 1931 AGED 66 YEARS.  
R • I • P

The words relate that the husband died almost six years after his wife and was buried in the same place. The bas-relief expresses the continuity between death and afterlife. Isabella and the angel are flying to an otherworldly sphere. The euphemism «fell asleep» emphasises a conception of death as a passage from the immanence of this world to an otherworldly place where «we» (the couple? the visitors of the grave?) will meet again. The end is not an end point but just a phase. Combining image and text, the gravestone refers to a belief in eternal life, recalling widespread religious ideas of angels, heavens and otherworldly sites. In this case, the visitor can detect a Christian framing, whereby grief is linked with hope, in the expectation of meeting again in the afterlife. Here the materiality of the grave acts as a marker on the path between life and afterlife, its religious significance explicit in the link to a tradition and to a symbol system.

The reference to continuity between life before death and life after death is expressed differently in the next example (fig. 3). This much more recent gravestone is made of a dark stone slab pierced through in the centre about one third from the top. The margins of the hole have been crafted into the form of a star, with the star shape highlighted in gold. Under the star, five words, in the style of handwriting, are aligned on the vertical axis:

Star  
Shining  
Radiant  
Eternally  
Bright

The sculptural and textual composition suggests a comparison between the deceased women (Geraldine) and a star: the qualities of the star can apply to her as a living person but also to an idea of eternal life after death. They could also refer to her eternal memory. On a visual level, the sculpture combines the materiality of the carved stone with the void of the hole in the centre of the star. Furthermore, it stages the contrast between presence and absence by opposing the dark colour of the raw stone with the golden



Fig. 3: *Grave of Geraldine Adamson, East Cemetery*  
(Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).

light of the celestial body. The gravestone makes no clear reference to a precise cosmic image of the world. Here, the gravestone marks the limit between the darkness of death and the light of a star. By remaining open to interpretation, the grave actively engages the visitor, inspiring varied interpretations of death and afterlife.

By contrast, the gravestone in fig. 4 resists the idea of death as a passage between being in this world and an otherworldly existence. The sculpture was designed by the artist Patrick Caulfield, who was buried here in 2005. In this case, the memorial materialises the idea of death as an everlasting condition. The letters «D - E - A - D» form steps; the reading direction indicates a falling stair. Like the gravestone in fig. 3, the sculpture plays with the contrast between a concrete presence, here of the dark stone, and a void, here created in the letters. This tomb marks distinctly the separation of life and death: the visitor is on the side of the living, the remains of



*Fig. 4: Grave of Patrick Caulfield, East Cemetery (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).*

Patrick Caulfield belong to the community of the dead. This sculpture stages mortality and finitude in a radical way. Furthermore, it demands the involvement of its viewer, who is to assume the role of reader. The stele as a work of art is entirely tautological, fixing the references explicitly by means of the design and performing the end of human life. At the same time, as an artefact designed by the deceased himself, the sculpture enacts the relationship between artist and work, with the latter surviving the former and, in a sense, rendering him imperishable.

The materiality of a grave affects its viewers, engaging them in a communication process and demanding interpretation. Depending on the visual and sculptural programme, the relationship between the visitor and the deceased person, and the bond between the material representation and the references, the mental image varies. The dynamics of interpretation contribute to the continuous transformations of a cemetery. Such material communication keeps alive the culture of burials that was initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remains an option within today's methods of dealing with death and the dead. This communication enables the memory of

the deceased to endure while also establishing finitude as a fundamental trait of the human condition.<sup>15</sup>

The material dimension of a grave has been the starting point for our tour through the cemetery. The concreteness of a memorial prescribes how the living and the dead communicate. The memory of the dead, their body invisible, is incarnated in the stone. The materiality of the memorial ascribes the memory of the deceased with a three-dimensional, spatial presence.

### 3. *Bodily Encounters*

At the second station of our imaginary walk through Highgate Cemetery, our reflection focuses on the bodily dimensions implied by a grave. Viewed through this lens, the memorial appears even more paradoxical, for it makes visible an invisible corpse and attributes perennality to a body that immediately upon death has begun to degenerate.

The corporeal performance of a grave is manifold.<sup>16</sup> By visiting a memorial, by looking at the sculpture, the body of the visitor engages in a communication process mediated by materiality. In this exchange between bodies – the living body of the visitor, the lifeless body of the deceased, and the material body of the memorial – the gaze is crucial. According to Gottfried Boehm, the eye links the human to the world and also to himself or herself. In the context of visual studies, Boehm correlates the eye to self-reflexion and an associated twofold capability: «to see and yet to watch oneself».<sup>17</sup> In this way, the body of the visitor meets the body of the deceased. This idea of encounter is plastically represented in the recurring motif of clasped hands, often accompanied by the inscription «We shall meet again». In fig. 5 the motif is prominently placed on an upper socle of the memorial dedicated to William Thomas Barrow and other members of his family that is located in the western part of Highgate Cemetery. The clasped hands anticipate an imaginary afterlife encounter between members of the family. On a visual level, this corporeal contact takes place in the moment in which the visitor looks at the bas-relief.

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15 On the concept of memory and its link to materiality see Assmann 2010.

16 For the concept of corporeal performativity, particularly in religious symbol systems, see Ornella/Knauss/Höpflinger 2014.

17 «Selbstreflexion meint eine doppelte menschliche Befähigung: zu sehen und sich selbst dabei zuzuschauen», Boehm 2001, 39–40 (translation from the German original by the author).



*Fig. 5: Family grave of William Thomas Barrow, West Cemetery (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgianti 2018).*

In the complex composition of the grave, this sculptural connection of stone hands transmits the immediacy of bodily contact, a desire that is unrealisable when sensed before a grave. The depicted contact is a reminder of the barrier between life and death, and of the radicality of the dissolution of the body and the impossibility of any direct contact with the dead person. In the gravestone reproduced in fig. 6, the inscription locates the encounter between the imagined bodies, portrayed in the chiselled hands, in a Christian eschatological context:

THE CUP WAS BITTER THE STING SEVERE  
TO PART WITH ONE I LOVED SO DEAR  
MY TROUBLES WERE GREAT I WILL NOT COMPLAIN  
BUT TRUST IN CHRIST TO MEET AGAIN.

The text is written as a retrospective on the time of grieving and ends looking forward to a future reuniting in Christ. The ribbon of ivy, an evergreen, emphasises the ideas of immortality and eternity as well as friendship, fidelity and marriage.<sup>18</sup>

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18 In the Victorian era flowers and plants were used as a language following precise rules and significations that were diffused in magazines and books. See Greenaway 1884, 23, for the symbolism of ivy. See also Lehner/Lehner 1960, 119; Seaton 1995, 180–181; Chwalkowski 2016, 245–246. See also the contribution by Ann Jeffers in this book, «Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?».



Fig. 6: Grave of Mary Ann Brown, East Cemetery (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).

Photography is an additional, and widely used, visual medium that allows an imagined encounter between the viewer and the deceased. The relationship between this medium and death is striking, an affinity that has been formulated by Hans Belting thus: « t he new picture that so emphatically held evidence of life in fact produced a shadow of life. [...] One can no longer quit one's own image: it does not hold on to the life that it depicts, or holds on to it in such a contradictory manner that the life quickly escapes out of it».<sup>19</sup>

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19 Belting, 2000, 170: «Das neue Bild, das so emphatisch den Beweis des Lebens führte, produzierte in Wahrheit einen Schatten des Lebens. [...] Man kann sein eigenes Bild nicht mehr verlassen: es hält das Leben nicht fest, das es aufzeichnet,



The photograph reproduced in fig. 7 is a portrait of Mounira (Mary) Desira, who is buried in the eastern part of Highgate Cemetery. This picture is a materialised memory of the dead woman, with the photograph attributing to her a unique visual identity.



*Fig. 7: Grave of Mounira (Mary) Desira, East Cemetery  
(Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).*

The photograph, which appears to have been professionally produced, depicts her in the middle of her life (possibly aged between 40 and 50) and condenses the biography of a person who lived for over 83 years into one particular moment of that life, the instant in which the picture was taken.<sup>20</sup>

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oder hält es so widersprüchlich fest, dass das Leben rasch aus ihm entweicht»  
(translation from the German original by the author).

20 On the relationship between image and metaphor see Boehm 2001, 30.

The photograph defines the encounter with the occupant of the grave and constantly updates the presence of the invisible body. Paradoxically, the immediacy of the portrait also expresses the ephemeral nature of life: the picture captures only an instant of a life, an instant that immediately became part of the past. The portrait on the gravestone materialises the memory of the dead woman, but in so doing it anchors her in the past.

The composition of the memorial as a whole reinforces the fleeting nature of life as evoked by the photograph. An Ankh cross, a Coptic cross and a Maltese cross make reference to an Egyptian Christian background. Death and life converge in the cross, the central symbol of Christianity. The literary lines on the lower part of the memorial emphasise the impact of the death through recognition of what has been lost.<sup>21</sup>

In the encounter between viewer and grave, the body of the deceased is transitorily re-established in the form of a memory of a living person. The meeting of the bodies of the living and of the dead, an encounter mediated by the materiality of a (selected) sculptural motif or a photograph, complicates the entangled linking of presence and absence that the grave articulates and locates within the cemetery.

#### 4. *Graves as Multi-layered Places*

As noted, our guided tour to select memorials in Highgate Cemetery is designed around an anthropological approach to images that are understood here as dynamic communication processes: the materiality of the grave interacts with the visitor who looks at it. In the exchange between viewer and work, meanings are produced; in this process, the dead body, the sculpture as a body, and the viewer, understood as a living body, are inter-related. The third station of this walk takes us to the spatial dimension, which makes possible this «corporeal» exchange. If we are to probe further to establish how images perform as socio-religious practices in a cemetery, we must add to our reflections on what materiality does and how the bodies involved interact with that materiality consideration of the locus where the triangulation between materiality, mental images and the body *takes place*.

Carla Danani describes spatiality as *the* basis of existence: «Human life is an existence within, and through, spatiality because it is a life in, and

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21 The epitaph contains a quotation from the first chapter of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*, entitled «The Coming of the Ship», Gibran 1923, 5.

through, a conscious body: it perceives, acts and moves around by having a certain grip on space that allows the human being orientation and to be located. [...] Human beings, therefore, like things, are always somewhere [...]. Though human beings and things have different relationships with the places they occupy. We can say of the human being that in a strict sense it *inhabits*.» In deploying the verb «to inhabit», Danani highlights the transient locating of human bodily existence.<sup>22</sup> With this link between spatiality and body, temporal transiency assumes intensified significance within the cemetery and in front of the grave.

Sociologist Thorsten Benkler has summed up the cemetery since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as «the «located» culmination of the sepulchral development in modernity.»<sup>23</sup> His approach to the modern cemetery arises from a recognition that cemeteries mirror changes in the social significance of death and in approaches to death. He points out that there is a substantial difference between death as a biological process and death as a social phenomenon. Only when the deceased's remains lie in the grave are the survivors able to deal with the dynamics of death. <sup>24</sup> «To be buried in a cemetery means having overcome the *problem of death*» as a personal problem.»<sup>25</sup> According to Benkler, the grave is first of all the place where the deceased is integrated into the community of the dead. He defines the grave as a «topographically framed signifying construction.»<sup>26</sup>

In the context of our tour, which is an (imagined) spatial practice in itself, the cemetery *as a place* produces meaning; the spatial extension of the grave and the cemetery, the latter a delimited site holding the entire post-mortem community, locates both the remains of the deceased and encounters between those living in society and the idealised society of all the dead. Place is here also understood as a dimension of visual performativity, for it complements the materiality of an image. Or, in other words, the extension of every materialisation of a mental image has volume, which means that visual communication is always realised in place. Within the performative approach to Highgate Cemetery articulated in the studies collected

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22 Danani 2013, 19–20 (translation from the Italian original by the author).

23 «[...] das «verräumlichte» Kulminat der Sepulkralentwicklung der Moderne», Benkel 2012, 9 (translation from the German original by the author).

24 Benkel 2012, 8–11.

25 Benkel 2012, 37.

26 «Er [der Friedhof] ist ein topographisch gerahmtes Sinnkonstrukt»; Benkel 2012, 42.

in this volume, spatiality can be engaged in different forms, by considering the physical, social and symbolic dimensions of space.<sup>27</sup>



*Fig. 8: Entrance to the West Cemetery, captured from the interior courtyard (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).*

As a physical location, Highgate Cemetery appears to be a clearly delineated site. Access to Highgate Cemetery East and Highgate Cemetery West is regulated by an entrance to each cemetery. The Victorian access building to the western cemetery, situated at Swain's Lane, preserves the original layout designed by Stephen Geary, founder of the company, architect and entrepreneur,<sup>28</sup> with only a few changes. The entrance gate is in the middle of the building, which contains a chapel for Anglicans and a chapel for Non-conformists (in fig. 8, on the right and left respectively). The entrance to the eastern cemetery is also regulated by a gate. Both sites are enclosed by walls or fences (fig. 9). Although some of the western sections are overgrown (and recall a wild forest more than an English garden), Highgate Cemetery was conceived as a precisely designed landscape that took advantage of its favourable elevated position and some pre-existing elements like the cedar tree that was then integrated into the Circle of Lebanon.<sup>29</sup>

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27 On space and its sociological significance see Löw 2001. See also the contribution by Carla Danani in this volume.

28 Bulmer 2014, 14.

29 Meller 1994, 155. See also the contribution by Alberto Saviello in this volume.



*Fig. 9: The fence delimiting the East Cemetery towards the north (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).*

The planning of the cemetery in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century which sought to realise new ideas about burials and sepulchral post-mortem culture, together with today's approach to the cemetery as both a historical site and a burial site, belong to the second layer of spatial meaning making. The social dimension of a place concerns relationships within the communities that inhabit and shape a given area. Walls and fences detach and isolate the cemetery from the outer urban settlement. By means of gates, the transition into and from the cemetery can be controlled. Lanes, stairs, and monumental landscape elements like the Egyptian Avenue or the Terrace Catacombs as well as the many unpretentious small paths determine the routes to different parts of the cemetery, the accessibility of certain memorials, and movement through the whole area.

In the eastern part the graves appear to be arranged according to ideological, religious or national belonging (for example, the graves of many fellow communists are close to the memorial of Karl Marx and his wife, Jenny von Westphalen). In the western section, by contrast, the division between Anglicans and Non-conformists is very distinct and has been clearly marked since the foundation of the cemetery. As noted above, the ability to dedicate part of the cemetery for the burial of Non-conformists was a crucial impetus for the creation of Victorian cemetery companies.

Although the specific area was small, its existence allowed religious diversity within the cemetery.<sup>30</sup>

The layout, internal organisation, division and siting of the cemetery within a general urban design should not be considered only in light of the physical and social dimensions of space. Each aspect also has symbolic meaning. We have noted that the cemetery exists also as an enclosed community of the dead. In this location, this ‘other’ society is not only protected (for example, from the body-snatchers of the Victorian era) but also kept together and separated distinctly from the urban community. The cemetery locates death and thus symbolically elaborates the finitude of human life. At the same time, it articulates difference:<sup>31</sup> each memorial refers to the former life of the person or persons it commemorates and mirrors their individual, familiar and social position in an idealised way. In the quiet garden cemetery the men and women who lie side by side may have lived and died almost 200 years apart. Different generational, gender, religious, ideological and national identities are very visible in the memorials but they are harmonised through their belonging to the same physical, social and symbolic territory.

Consideration of the spatiality of the cemetery as a whole is thus illuminating, but so too is the small-scale spatial approach that looks at single graves. As our tour comes to an end, we can pause to reflect on two specific memorials in light of spatial performance.

Fig. 10 depicts the memorial of Harry Thornton, a pianist who was born in 1883 and died in 1918, a victim of the influenza pandemic.<sup>32</sup> His grave is unique. The form of a grand piano stands out in this part of the East Cemetery, where it is located next to traditional crosses and plain headstones. Like each and every memorial, this particular grave marker indicates both the location where its subject was buried and that person’s position within the community of the living. Other than his name, the memorial reveals no information about Thornton. The piano makes

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30 «They [the cemeteries] were usually divided religiously into sections dedicated to various denominations, and socially by sections dictated by the price of the grave plots», Rutherford 2008, 5.

31 «Not only does each monument, tomb or gravestone pinpoint the location of a grave, but its decoration, material, design and position within the Cemetery can indicate the deceased’s position in society. At Highgate, one of the London Cemetery Company’s rules even stipulated that plots purchased within 20 feet (6 m) of a pathway had to be marked with a monument, whereas simpler, smaller grave-stones were allowed at greater distance», Bulmer 2014, 26.

32 <https://highgatecemetery.org/visit/who#music> (accessed June 14, 2018).

Thornton's profession *the* marker of his identity. The grave is entirely dedicated to his art, with the epitaph a quotation from Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*:<sup>33</sup>



*Fig. 10: Grave of Harry Thornton, East Cemetery  
(Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2017).*

SWEET TH[O]U ART SLEEPIN[G]  
CRADLED ON MY HEART  
S[A]FE IN GOD'S KEEPIN[G]  
WHILE I MUST WEEP APART

The piano's presence in this sepulchral landscape locates the deceased according to his social function as a pianist. But the grave symbolises the threshold between life and death, between music that can be performed and the silence of a marble instrument. The grave marker in the form of a musical instrument locates Thornton as a unique individual, but at the same time it refers to the silent realm of the deceased, where uniqueness is exchanged for the common experience of death.

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33 Act II, second part, English version from 1906.



Fig. 11: Family vault of Sir Benjamin Hawes K.C.B., West Cemetery  
(Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).

The vault in fig. 11 is a particularly striking example of spatial performativity. Its wording reads:

THE FAMILY VAULT OF  
SIR BENJAMIM HAWES K.C.B.

The vault is located in the West Cemetery, exactly on the boundary between the part reserved for Anglicans and the part where Non-conformists are buried. Slightly under the quoted inscription, on the left, in a small incision, it is written «CONSECRATED» and on the right, symmetrically placed, «NON CONSECRATED» (seen from the perspective of a visitor facing the vault). We can therefore assume that the bodies of the members of the family were spatially located in the part of the vault that correspond-



ed with each individual's religious denomination, Anglicans on the left and Non-conformists on the right. The confessional separation within the West Cemetery marks a continuity with burial practices that preceded the construction of Victorian garden cemeteries. The family vault of Benjamin Hawes (1797–1862),<sup>34</sup> who served as chairman of Highgate Cemetery, assumes a threshold function physically, socially and symbolically. It unites what in the society of the living has to be separated, but without breaking the spatial and social rules of the cemetery. The austere layout of the vault proposes the equality of the two sides, for it is perfectly symmetrical. Above the inscription a bas-relief of snowdrops, the first flowers to grow at the end of winter and used as a symbol of hope and consolation,<sup>35</sup> is combined with a quotation from 1 Corinthians 15:36, from a passage that discusses the body in resurrection:

THAT WHICH THOU SOWEST IS NOT QUICKENED, EXCEPT TO DIE

In life human societies are divided, but in death and in hope for a kind of afterlife all seem equal. The individual must experience death if he or she is to be part of an afterlife. Sharp social distinctions between denominations are annihilated through this particular spatial location and the reference to a shared system of symbols, with a common sacred book and the same eschatological expectations.

A spatial perspective on the tension between the presence of a materialised memory and the absence of the dead illuminates the complexity of the relationships that are enacted by a grave and, more generally, by this cemetery. The need for a physical place to bury the corpse, the negotiation of rules regulating individual, familiar and social difference within a community and the imaginaries of the post-mortem society that inhabits the enclosed landscape are all part of cultural meaning-making processes that arise in the interaction of the materiality of the tomb and the bodily practices linked to it. Those processes are affixed in place, at the locus of the encounter between dead and living.

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34 Meller 1994, 164; Boase 2013.

35 See «Spring Flowers», in *Golden Hours: A Monthly Magazine for Family and General Reading*, March 1883, 163–167 or Dyer 1879, 172; Greenaway 1884, 39; Lehner/Lehner 1960, 125; Seaton 1995, 194–195.

### 5. *Staging Diversity Facing a Common Condition*

When we visit graves in this still-functioning Victorian cemetery, how do images that we encounter affect us? This contribution has explored aspects of the complex field of visual performativity in the particular context of Highgate Cemetery, using an approach that originates in the triangulation of three fundamental concepts in the analysis of visual communication in the study of religion: materiality, body and place. The dynamics and relationships of these concepts have been discussed as we stood before a few selected memorials, from different times and different locations within the site. At the centre of this triangulation lies an anthropological concept of the image and its agency, with the image considered an entity capable of engaging in complex communication processes. Horst Bredekamp has analysed this capacity of images by adapting speech-act theories to visual communication. He points out that «reciprocally to the speech-act, the question for the image-act concerns the power that enables the image when seen or touched to leap out from latency to have external impact in feeling, thinking and action».<sup>36</sup>

The analysis of graves and cemeteries against this theoretical background highlights the role and function of visual communication in the face of a drastic aspect of contingency: life is limited and finite. For a scholar of religion, a Victorian cemetery is particularly interesting as a spatial practice that makes (religious) diversity visible and at the same time harmonises difference. In principle, Highgate Cemetery was conceived for all citizens, in response to social questions about the handling of the dead, and it created a post-mortem circumscribed society within a defined enclosure. Here the members of this society of the dead could be remembered individually and collectively by relatives and/or by society as a whole. Nevertheless, economic considerations, social status, and religious affiliation or ideological orientation played a part in determining the form of burial and memorialization that the dead received. The cemetery stages diversity through material and visual practices.

Each gaze upon a cemetery can only be partial. Time brings decay that sees graves and memorials disappear. The cemetery evolves and changes continuously. Furthermore, in such an imagined short guided tour only fragments of a complex performance can be displayed. A leitmotif has emerged from the examples we have visited virtually, in the tension between death and life, between absence and presence, between the social

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36 Bredekamp 2013, 52.

community of death and remembrance of the unique individual. The graves are part of a social practice in handling death and the dead, whom they necessarily separate from the living. Furthermore, their memorials respond to a need to represent social diversity in a way that is both idealised and harmonised.

«From one year to the next, they say, the Eusapia of the dead becomes unrecognizable. And the living, to keep up with them, also want to do everything that the hooded brothers tell them about the novelties of the dead. So the Eusapia of the living has taken to copying its underground copy.

They say that this has not just now begun to happen: actually it was the dead who built the upper Eusapia, in the image of their city. They say that in the twin cities there is no longer any way of knowing who is alive and who is dead».<sup>37</sup>

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37 Calvino 1974, 110.

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# The Politics of Death

## Death and Politics in Victorian England

*Ann Jeffers*

### *1. Introduction*

This paper will introduce the various sociological, economic and political contexts which undergird the creation of Highgate Cemetery as one of seven new garden cemeteries in London during Victorian times. This heralded a radical change in interment practice, the causes of which can be found in a complex interplay between a number of factors. Firstly, the sharp increase of population in London precipitated a crisis in interment practices: local church graveyards became over-crowded which led to shocking unsanitary practices (this is well documented in both preliminary reports from the commission led by the reformer Edwin Chadwick, and by contemporary literature). Connected with this over-crowding are the health issues which threatened the life of the living. A second, and associated factor, can be found in the rise of anatomy schools and their increased need for bodies for dissection. The Anatomy Act of 1832 went some way to curb the increasing traffic in bodies from «resurrection men» and led to the need to secure graves. Thirdly, the beginning of the industrial revolution, the rise of capitalism, and the emergence of a middle class contributed to a shift in attitude towards the decomposed body (often seen as a commodity). Under the influence of the works of the architect John Loudon and the social reformer Edwin Chadwick, The General Cemetery Company was created in 1832 to establish private, commercial cemeteries. This was followed by The Burial Act of 1852 which officially ended burials in London churchyards. Highgate Cemetery was the third of these of these commercial cemeteries, with its Western part opened in 1839, and its Eastern part in 1854. Finally, a short history of the varying fortunes of Highgate Cemetery will be sketched until the present day.

## 2. *The Intellectual Climate*

The creation of garden cemeteries in England in the course of the nineteenth century emerged from a complex set of interrelated factors. While it is clear that the material changes brought about by the explosion of population in urban centres and the beginning of the industrial revolution were contributing factors to a reformist movement which sought to rethink the place of the dead body within society, the shift in the intellectual climate has much to contribute to the debate. When William Wordsworth writes his poem *We are Seven*, a fictional encounter of a «little maid» with a man questioning her about her siblings, he was expressing a shift in understanding death. The young girl represents traditional beliefs rooted in the continuity between life and death while the man represents a new rationality, and by extension is representative of the mindset of the burial reformers, characterised by a strict separation between body and soul:<sup>1</sup>

Then did the little Maid reply,  
«Seven boys and girls are we;  
Two of us in the church-yard lie,  
Beneath the church-yard tree.»

«You run about, my little Maid,  
Your limbs they are alive;  
If two are in the church-yard laid,  
Then ye are only five.»

[...]

«How many are you, then,» said I,  
«If they two are in heaven?»  
Quick was the little Maid's reply,  
«O Master! we are seven.»

«But they are dead; those two are dead!  
Their spirits are in heaven!»  
'Twas throwing words away; for still  
The little Maid would have her will,  
And said, «Nay, we are seven!»<sup>2</sup>

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1 Sánchez-Eppler 1998, 420.

2 Wordsworth 1909–1914, 394. <https://www.bartleby.com/41/394.html> (accessed June 18, 2018).



Sánchez-Eppler's view is that for Wordsworth the grave marks «presence» rather than «loss», thus exemplifying a deep-seated sense of the community of the dead with that of the living.<sup>3</sup> This is a good illustration of the widening gap between two world-views, and the emergence of a new conception of death. This situation reflects the philosophical debate between Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine.<sup>4</sup> The former speaks of the dead as «benevolent ancestors», while the latter emphasises the discontinuity between the living and the dead, transforming the dead into a threatening body, potentially harmful to the living. We must not underestimate the importance of this imaginary world, the «imagined community» theorised by Benedict Anderson.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, re-imagining boundaries between life and death, to the exclusion of the dead body, is going to be crucial in the changing world of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Utilitarianism also played a part in the changing intellectual climate of the nineteenth century and will help the reformers to conceptualise the changes. Two more thinkers, Jeremy Bentham and William Godwin helped pave the way to reshaping positive attitudes to the dead: not just an erasure of the corpse, but a reconceptualisation of the body's place in society.<sup>6</sup> In his *Essay on Sepulchres: or, a Proposal for Erecting some Memorial of the Illustrious Dead in all Ages on the Spot where their Remains have been Interred* (1809), the radical philosopher William Godwin suggests that the bodies of the dead be subjected to the demands of the living.<sup>7</sup> Utilitarian consequentialism and utilitarian ethics introduce new questions about the disposal of the dead body: how should dead bodies be treated? Should they be dissected, and should body parts be used for utilitarian purposes, for example, using heads as building blocks? Should they be stuffed?<sup>8</sup> What is the role of emotion in the burial process? The shift is important: these questions show a move from viewing the dead as

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3 See Sánchez-Eppler 1998, 421–422, for a useful commentary on the poem, with reference to Wordsworth's attitude to death.

4 William Wordsworth's poems, «We are Seven», «Michael» (1800) and «The Brothers» (1800) in which the living enjoy the communion of the dead, all endorse the view of Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), quoted in McAllister 2018, 62. Thomas Paine's views are expanded in full in his *Rights of Man* (1791), where he makes it clear that the dead «tyrants» are a «conservative monolith that stood in the way of change», McAllister 2018, 63.

5 Anderson 2006.

6 McAllister 2018, 192.

7 McAllister 2018, 196–198.

8 See Bentham's wish for his body to be stuffed and made into an «auto-icon», McAllister 2018, 223.

part of the community, to regarding the dead as a body to be disposed of, albeit in a decent way. As McAllister writes, the «burial is determined by the consequential effect on the living».<sup>9</sup> A prime example of this axial shift is the debate on providing bodies to medical schools for dissection.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Southwood Smith called for the unclaimed bodies of the poor who died in hospitals and workhouses to be passed on to medical schools. The utilitarian aspect of the body will dominate the reformist debate which led to the Burial Acts in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> These preliminary reflections are inseparable from the socio-economic context which will lead to a series of burial reforms. In fact these will embody the philosophical principles outlined above.

### 3. *The Population Explosion*

With this background in mind, there is no doubt that the main impetus for the shift of attitudes comes from demographic changes.<sup>12</sup> The exponential growth of cities, in particular London, combined with the high mortality rates intensified by a series of cholera, influenza and typhoid epidemics in the 1830s and 1840s resulted in a clamour for change in burial practices.<sup>13</sup> However, the notorious overcrowding of churchyards had been a long-standing problem. Since the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the intramural burial practices called for much concern and criticism. Sánchez-Eppler for instance, cites The Revd Thomas Lewis who, in 1721 wrote a pamphlet tellingly entitled «Seasonal Considerations on the Decent and Dangerous Custom of BURYING in Churches and Churchyards,...Proving that the Custom is... fatal, in case of INFECTION», arguing for a change from intra-mural graveyard interments to extra-mural

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9 McAllister 2018, 223.

10 Richardson 1987 wrote a comprehensive work on the history and background of the Anatomy Act. She mentions that in the 18th and early 19th century all medical education was transacted on a private basis. Since Henry VIII, the sole legal source for corpses for dissection had been the gallows – bodies of murderers handed over to the anatomists as post-mortem punishment.

11 It is well to mention here that there were anxieties about this utilitarianism, as appeared in various pamphlets. See McAllister 2018, 196.

12 McAllister 2018, 155.

13 London's population rose from 960,00 in 1801 to 2 million by 1840 (Holtz 2009, 19). The population of London doubled again between 1859 and 1909 (Rutherford 2008, 31).

burials, especially in cities.<sup>14</sup> When the size of London's population doubles between 1800 and 1840, land dedicated for graveyards cannot meet the burial demands of the population and gives rise to acute health concerns. Much has been written on the subject, so I will concentrate here on the figure of the surgeon George Alfred Walker who visited a great number of London graveyards and collated his findings in *Gatherings from graveyards: particularly those of London: with a concise history of the modes of interment among different nations, from the earliest periods. And a detail of dangerous and fatal results produced by the unwise and revolting custom of inhuming the dead in the midst of the living* (1839).<sup>15</sup> A quote from Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, although written later, will suffice to illustrate the horror of this situation:

Then the active and intelligent [beadle], who has got into the morning papers as such, comes with his pauper company to Mr. Krook's and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed, while our dear brothers and sisters who hang about official back-stairs--would to heaven they HAD departed!--are very complacent and agreeable. Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed to receive Christian burial. With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate--with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life--here they lower our dear brother down a foot or two, here sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside, a shameful testimony to future ages how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together.<sup>16</sup>

Walker's extensive report attracted the attention of Parliament which three years later appointed a House of Commons Committee to investigate «the evils arising from the interment of bodies»<sup>17</sup> in large towns and cities and to consider legislation to remedy the problem. His work also attracted the

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14 Sánchez-Eppler 1998, 146.

15 <https://archive.org/details/b21902963/page/n4> (accessed August 17, 2019).

16 Dickens 2003 (1853), 11.96–97. The novel was serialised between 1852 and 1853. See also, Blount 1963.

17 This was widely believed to give rise to «miasma». Miasma theory held that under predictable circumstances the atmosphere became charged with an epidemic in-

attention of social reformers as he evidenced the catastrophic effects of the noxious state of graveyards in London on its poor population. The lawyer Edwin Chadwick, who was appointed secretary of the New Poor Law Commission from 1834–1842 and commissioner for the board of health from 1848–1852, followed up Walker's report with his *A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* (1843).<sup>18</sup>

Strictly speaking, cemeteries were not new: Bunhill Fields, was originally created in 1665 by and for Dissenters and constitutes one of London first public burial grounds. Models from continental Europe, and in particular Père Lachaise in Paris, as well as those provided by examples in the British empire offer models which combine the all too important hygienic standards with its accompanying morality.

The creation of private extra-mural cemeteries in London in 1830 was headed by the General Cemetery Company, an initiative which was ahead of the legislation providing both a response to the crisis, and a way forward.<sup>19</sup> After an outbreak of cholera, an act of Parliament (1832) permitted the company to establish a cemetery by the Grand Union Canal at Kensal Green. This was the first of seven private cemeteries dotted around London and commonly referred to as «the magnificent seven».<sup>20</sup> Although a virtual monopoly was enjoyed by the joint-stock companies through the 1840s, there was a clear need for publicly funded extra-mural cemeteries.<sup>21</sup>

The new legislation aimed to reshape and reorder the world of the living by redefining public and private space: the dead were now excluded from the land of the living. A number of governmental initiatives took place regarding burials and burial practices.<sup>22</sup> As previously noted, Walker's report was crucial to the creation and implementation of a number of reforms. Chadwick took Walker's report forward in his two part 1843 *Re-*

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fluence, which turned malignant when combined with effluvia of organic decomposition from the earth. The resulting miasma produced disease from the body. Chadwick thought of the dead as «miasmatically hazardous waste» (McAllister 2018, 21).

18 Hotz, 2001.

19 Hotz 2001, 22.

20 Thee seven were: Kensal Green (1833), West Norwood (1837), Highgate (1839), Abney Park (1840), Brompton (1840) Nunhead (1840) and Tower Hamlets (1841).

21 The Cemetery Clauses Acts of 1847 gave private companies directions regarding laying out cemeteries.

22 A comprehensive analysis of the reformist legislation can be found in Amadei 2014, 47–55.

port on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring population of Great Britain - A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interments in Towns in which he argued for a complete review of burial regulations of the time.<sup>23</sup> He also famously connected poverty with unsanitary living conditions and the high rate of urban mortality among working class people with overcrowded graveyards.<sup>24</sup> The reports led to Public Health Acts of 1848 and 1849, and the Burial Acts of 1852 and 1857.<sup>25</sup> Among the successes of the new legislation regulating the deceased body, is the Anatomy Act of 1832 which effectively put an end to «resurrectionists».<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. The Body, Ethics, Hygiene and Aesthetics

The new language about death and burial now combines both a discourse about hygiene (the corpse as pollutant), a discourse about morality, and a new aesthetics. The botanist and landscape designer John Claudius Loudon, wanted to create an environment which was «morally uplifting» and which provided education for the poor: «a properly managed cemetery could become a school of instruction in architecture, botany, and the important points of general gardening: neatness and order» (*On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries, 1843*).<sup>27</sup> Cemeteries were to have

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23 Amadei 2014, 47.

24 Specifically, poor people were keeping the corpses of their dead in their home until they could find the money to pay for the funeral.

25 The Public Health Acts of 1848 and 1849 authorised the removal of corpses from private homes. The series of cholera outbreaks led to more governmental interventions with The Nuisances Removal and Disease Prevention Act (1849) which saw the appointment of Health Commissioners with authority to remove the corpse. Finally the Metropolitan Interment Act (1850) introduced «receiving houses» or morgues as a safe place for corpses before burial. Amadei 2014, 51. The Burial Act of 1852's main contribution was to regulate burial space, and ban intramural burials. The Burial Act of 1857 banned the reuse of graves.

26 For an extensive study of the Anatomy Act, see Richardson 1987. The scarcity of bodies created a demand: two notorious trials, Burke and Hare (1828) in Edinburgh and John Bishop, London (1831) indicted for trafficking bodies and body parts, brought the «resurrectionist» to the attention of the public. It is hard to miss the capitalistic overtones: the body is perceived as «utility» and «commodity» to be sold by the inch.

27 Loudon 1843, 12–13. Loudon was the first to use the word «arboretum». Abney Park in Stoke Newington, London was created as a garden cemetery and arboretum.

a visual impact. On the one hand this new discourse about aesthetics is also part of a rise in individualism. The new private cemetery companies offer the chance for individuals and families to make their own choices with regards to architectural monuments.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the new discourse draws on Romanticism as expressed in the «natural» settings of the cemeteries: «The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.»<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the conspicuous Greco-Roman architecture re-inscribes the idea of Western culture as «formative of cultural and national identity».<sup>30</sup> However, it seems that the triple effects of successful cemetery designs are firstly the isolation and containment of death, secondly the reformation of the lower classes to serve the interest of the wealthy and thirdly to create a suitable place for memorialisation and meditation.<sup>31</sup>

Finally the rise of capitalism in the nineteenth century impacts on the Victorian view of death and on the practical implementation of dealing with dead bodies. It has been said that the private cemetery companies accentuated the «class-bound death cultures» of Victorian England.<sup>32</sup> Indeed an analysis of class should undergird any study of this burial reform movement: although there is a pervading idea that the corpse is viewed as «waste», there is a clear connection between the working class corpse, generator of disease and miasma and willingness to work. Indeed the working class's custom to keep the body in the house until there is enough money to pay for the funeral is seen to impact on the working space.<sup>33</sup> One of the implications of Chadwick's reform is to both medicalise and police death, through the introduction of the Reception House, and the creation of undertakers.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore the different class status of members of Victorian society are mirrored in their arrangements for the disposal of the dead: middle and upper-classes Victorians used death to symbolically express

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28 The architecture displayed in the Magnificent Seven can be best characterised as «eclectic», including Greco-Roman monuments, Gothic revival, and Egyptian style.

29 From the Preface to *ADONAI*: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822); Shelley 2009, 529.

30 Høglund 2010, 28.

31 The garden cemeteries «hide the organic realities of decomposition» (Sánchez-Eppler 1998, 423).

32 Richardson 1987, 262.

33 Hotz 2001, 23.

34 The creation of the function of undertakers represents «an invasion of commerce into the rite of passage» (Hotz 2001, 24).

their own social status through mourning and dress code, purchasing expensive and well situated burial plots mirroring the social status of their owners. The most ostentatious, and expensive of such burials were in stark contrast to the common graves, and a far cry from the pauper's funeral, as we are reminded in the following dirge:

«Rattle his bones over the stones,  
He's only a pauper, whom nobody owns.  
... He has left not a gap in the world now he's gone,  
... To the grave with his carcase as fast as you can».<sup>35</sup>

This is a far cry from the «beautiful death» which is depicted by the historian of death and burial Philip Ariès.<sup>36</sup> From the religious point of view, the evangelical revival contributes to the rise of the concept of «the good death» which is exemplified in the famous painting of Prince Albert's death, surrounded by his friends and family.<sup>37</sup> The Victorian Evangelical concept of «the good death»<sup>38</sup> is characterised by a combination of good luck, convenient illness, pious character, and familial affection and support, resulting in an eventual reunion with loved ones beyond death.<sup>39</sup> The emphasis shifts to the explicit expression of grief, and to its advertising on the tomb.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, epitaphs and funerary writings became an accepted and

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35 Noel, T., The Pauper's Drive, <https://www.bartleby.com/71/1414.html> (accessed August 20, 2019).

36 Ariès 1974, 409.

37 There are a number of paintings which typify this concept of the «good death». Wheeler includes also Henry Bowler, *The Doubt: Can These Dry Bones Live?* (1855), John Everett Millais, *The Vale of Rest* (1858), and John Martin, *The Plains of Heaven* (1853).

38 Lutz argues that evangelical revivals of the 1830s and 1840s were influenced by romanticism and help popularise the idea of the good death (Lutz 2015, 2). The rise of biblical criticism and the recognition of the concepts of analogy, typology and metaphor help to transform the discourse about death by using the metaphor of «sleep» to describe death (Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, 41, cited by Wheeler 1994, 219–220).

39 Jalland 1996, Curl 2002 and Wheeler 1994 all discuss this in some detail. Wheeler in particular argues that the language of consolation is expressed in terms of Christian hope. He discusses the reinterpretation of four theological terms (the «four last things»): death, judgement, heaven and hell (Wheeler 1994, 3). There is an emphasis on the continuity between life and death, and an idea of heaven as «community» (Wheeler 1994, 5).

40 Ariès 1981, 529–530.

popular art form as the hunt for epitaphs and collation of anthologies demonstrates.<sup>41</sup>

I shall conclude these reflections on the changing culture regarding death in Victorian times by returning to Highgate cemetery. While other cemeteries created in that period suffered an economic downturn to the change in demographic, with the arrival of poor immigrants,<sup>42</sup> by contrast Highgate Cemetery being well-established within the already prosperous area of Highgate village gained from the infrastructure already in place and became a part of a complex of institutions – including hospitals and workhouses. Resulting from combined factors ranging from aesthetic, philosophical and moral alongside commercial and social interests, Highgate Cemetery had a strong environmental impact and became a lasting model for the spatial reorganization of the growing metropolis.

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41 See for instance Vita 1999.

42 Kensal Green for instance.



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## II. Politics of Images



# Looking for Jenny & Co. The Image as Practice for a Feminist Imaginary

*Dolores Zoé Bertschinger*

Gender does not end in death. Tombstones are sources of biographical data such as profession, family ties and relationship status. Therefore, they also provide information on gender ratio, women's history and women's individual life stories. Looking at four selected tombstones, gender issues become strikingly visible: Jenny von Westphalen's grave is crowned with the huge statue of Karl Marx's head; the inscription on Ernestine L. Rose's tombstone reveals her to be a «womens rights and anti-slavery activist»; the sculptor Anna Mahler's grave shows a tiny, fragile woman, covering her face with her hands; and the plaques of Radclyffe Hall, Mabel Veronica Batten and Una Troubridge make clear the public dimension of lesbianism in the early 20th century. In the following contribution I will look at Highgate Cemetery as a women's place from a cultural studies perspective. At the intersection of the study of religion, art history and women's studies I will focus on the graves of Westphalen, Rose, Mahler and Hall as vibrant sources of women's history. I will elaborate on this history by setting the images of the four tombstones against the backdrop of each life story. Drawing on this «female presence» I will argue for a feminist imaginary to understand Highgate Cemetery's importance for our common history.

## *1. Is Highgate a Women's Place?*

From a socio-historical point of view it is not hard to define Highgate as a women's place. The first person ever buried in the West Cemetery was Elizabeth Jackson on 26 May 1839, age 36,<sup>1</sup> and the first burial in the East Cemetery was the 16 year old Mary Ann Webster on 12 June 1860.<sup>2</sup> From 1839 onwards there have always been significantly more female than male

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1 See Bulmer 2014, 20 and Barker 1984, 24.

2 See Bulmer 2014, 44.

burials at Highgate.<sup>3</sup> And finally, Highgate Cemetery was one of the few places where women in the Victorian era could gather and stroll along unimpeded and relatively free from male observation.<sup>4</sup> Despite these historical data, Francis Barker asserts in *Victorian Valhalla* (1984) that Highgate Cemetery «is a place to praise famous men».<sup>5</sup> He reinforces his argument by listing eminent surgeons and physicians, publishers, members of the Royal Academy, the Law, and other important social fields.<sup>6</sup> Barker continues, that this «sounds a very male catalogue» and just like «many old-fashioned clubs, Highgate would seem an exclusively masculine sanctuary. There are innumerable wives and daughters but so few women appear to be there in their own right.»<sup>7</sup> According to Barker, women in Highgate can be discovered in the realm of family ties and the gendered social order. What is missing, are women as independent subjects.

Indeed, Barker's research offers poor results: he found only one grave that «challenges the conventions of the cemetery».<sup>8</sup> What he found was the vault of Radclyffe Hall, Mabel Veronica Batten and Una Troubridge in the Lebanon Circle. We will never know, how intense Barker's effort was, trying to find women in their own right. What we can read, however, is that he calls the vault in the Lebanon Circle a mere «ladies' annexe».<sup>9</sup> With this description Barker dismisses any value that his discovery could have had for the history of Highgate Cemetery, thereby avoiding any further effort in investigating the remarkable life stories of the three women. By describing the vault as an «annexe» Barker also highlights the main problem of women's history: if by looking back into the past women do not *appear* in their own right, does it mean that there actually were no women living a life as independent, creative subjects? Of course feminist theory has long dismissed this question and its underlying claim, that «wives and daugh-

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3 This difference reached its peak in the 1870s, when more than 12,000 women and «only» about 11,000 men were buried per year. It is only since the 1980s that numbers have become more equally balanced as the overall numbers of burials dramatically decreased; see Bulmer 2014, 48.

4 Highgate Cemetery promised to be extremely secure with its tall brick walls and iron railings and the Highgate Company advertised that an armed force of retired soldiers were present all day and night in the cemetery; see Bulmer 2014, 20. Cemeteries in general, like all other Victorian institutions, had rules to ensure appropriate behaviour; see Rutherford 2010, 26.

5 Barker 1984, 38.

6 See Barker 1984, 39–41.

7 Barker 1984, 41.

8 Barker 1984, 41.

9 Barker 1984, 41.

ters» are not women in their own right, as Barker wrote.<sup>10</sup> The life stories of Westphalen, Rose, Mahler and Hall will show that it is only due to Barker's androcentric view that women do not seem to appear in their own right in Highgate. For if one *wants* to see women,<sup>11</sup> one does not even have to change perspective, one just has to take a closer look.

Since «the performative act of remembrance is an essential way in which collective identities are formed and reiterated»,<sup>12</sup> searching for women's representations in Highgate Cemetery is a decisive quest. It can be understood as a practice of a feminist imaginary that reveals Highgate to be a women's place. The term imaginary was developed by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, differentiating it from «imagination». <sup>13</sup> Although the concept of «imagination», defined in opposition to reason, has been used to establish gender bias since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it also held potential for women, as Joan Scott argues. French feminist and abolitionist Olympe de Gouges for example used the concept to demand citizenship, claiming her right on self-representation: «De Gouges's insistence on the imaginative basis for her own thought and action was meant to establish her autonomy, her ability to produce an authentic self (not a copy of anything else) – to be what she claimed to be – and so her eligibility for the franchise.»<sup>14</sup> Despite this attempt, devaluation of imagination could not be prevented and it was only with French philosophers such as Jacques Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, Luce Irigaray or (Greek-French) Cornelius Castoriadis that the *imaginaire* developed its critical substance in the second half of the 20th century.

Laurie Naranch writes in her article *The Imaginary and a Political Quest for Freedom* (2003) that the imaginary meant a decisive turn for feminist theory: «After a long spate as the adjective of imagination, a traditionally understood realm of illusion, misrecognition, and fancy, the imaginary emerges as not simply opposed to reason, but the «ground» of reason itself; [...] not simply a part of the mind, but fundamental to understanding the interconnectedness of mind and sexed bodies.»<sup>15</sup> She highlights the contribution of Castoriadis for a feminist understanding of the imaginary. Castoriadis formulated the workings of a «radical imagination» in two ways: that

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10 See for example Appich/Echtermann/Ferrari Schiefer/Hess 1993 on women and their dissident position in androcentric tradition.

11 See Olin 2003, 324–326 on the gaze corresponding with desire.

12 Winter 2010, 15.

13 See Naranch 2003, 64.

14 Scott 1996, 34; cited after Naranch 2003, 64.

15 Naranch 2003, 65.

of the psyche as radical imaginary, and that of society as social imaginary.<sup>16</sup> According to this understanding, the double functioning of the creative liberation through the radical imaginary as well as the instituting processes of the social imaginary are crucial for changes in history. Castoriadis emphasizes the importance of «a praxis as <the transformation of the given>».<sup>17</sup> It seems that this understanding of a practice of the radical imaginary derived directly from the women's liberation movements, for Castoriadis wrote:

The most important social and historical transformation of the contemporary era, [...] is neither the Russian Revolution nor the bureaucratic revolution in China but the changing situation of woman and of her role in society. This change [...] has been carried out collectively, anonymously, daily, by women themselves, without their even explicitly representing to themselves its goals; [...] twenty-four hours a day, in the home, at work, in the kitchen, in bed, in the street, in relation to children, to their husbands, they have gradually transformed the situation. Not only could planners, technicians, economists, sociologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts not have foreseen this, but they were not even able to see it when it began to take shape.<sup>18</sup>

Through everyday practices, most often not represented through political institutions, women's movement was and is at work.

According to Castoriadis' and Naranch's understanding, feminist theory of the imaginary does not aim to establish concepts of the best feminist practices and afterwards realize them in everyday life. Rather the feminist imaginary is a practice in itself, a «creative action» that puts «meaning into everyday practice and asks us to recognize it and act on it as such.»<sup>19</sup> By giving meaning to everyday practices, the feminist imaginary can be understood as representational practices, which are double bound by everyday struggles as well as knowledge and self-awareness thereof. Following this,

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16 See Naranch 2003, 67.

17 Naranch 2003, 66. The radical imaginary is based on representational practices in everyday struggles, that are neither a mere realization of a given plan nor are they opposed to knowledge. The radical imaginary is based on knowledge, «but this knowledge is always fragmentary and provisional. It is fragmentary because there can be no exhaustive theory of humanity and history; it is provisional because praxis itself constantly gives rise to new knowledge [...]» Castoriadis 1998, 76; cited after Naranch 2003, 71.

18 Castoriadis 1991, 204–205; cited after Naranch 2003, 71–72.

19 Naranch 2003, 71.



looking for Jenny & Co. in Highgate requires no extraordinary effort, it will not lead the reader on hidden tracks or to secret tombs. We will walk the official paths just as everyone else does, but take a closer look at the vaults and get to know the lives of Jenny von Westphalen, Ernestine L. Rose, Anna Mahler, and Radclyffe Hall.

## *2. Jenny von Westphalen: The Socialist Networker*

Entering East Highgate we follow the main path together with scattered groups of tourists. After a sweeping curve we catch sight of people flocking in front of a monument: tourists take pictures or pose for it, a woman circumambulates the huge grey stele with an umbrella, an elderly couple places a bunch of roses on the flagstones (fig. 1).



*Fig. 1: Looking for Jenny von Westphalen our eyes behold the huge bust of her husband Karl Marx (Image: Dolores Zoé Bertschinger 2017).*

Even from a distance we are able to read the shiny golden letters on the memorial, saying «workers of all lands unite», the name of «Karl Marx» and below the slab the most famous concluding sentence from Marx's theses on Feuerbach: «The Philosophers Have Only Interpreted The World In Various Ways – The Point, However, Is To Change It».<sup>20</sup> Stepping closer, we discover that visitors have lit candles, put flowers and even left a piece of garlic (fig. 2). The practice of putting little stones on a marble projection of the monument probably refers to Karl Marx's Jewish origin.<sup>21</sup> We can also find this practice on the memorial stone at the original burial place (fig. 3).



*Figs. 2 and 3: Visitors light candles and lay down flowers and onions. Putting stones on a tombstone is an old Jewish tradition and can be seen on the Marx monument as well as on the tombstone on the original burial place (Images: Dolores Zoé Bertschinger 2017).*

Now we are also able to read the names of all the other people buried in the family grave underneath this massive memorial. On the white marble

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20 Marx's theses on Feuerbach can be found on [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org). For a concise interpretation of the theses see chapter 3 «Marx's Adoption of Radical Historicism» in West 1991, 63–69; for the concluding thesis 11 see 68–69.

21 See Suzgruber 2018.

slab we find the names of Jenny von Westphalen (1814–1881), «the beloved wife of Karl Marx», Karl Marx (1818–1883), Harry Longuet (1878–1883), Helena Demuth (1823–1890) and Eleanor Marx (1856–1898), «daughter of Karl Marx» (fig. 4). Against the overall impression of this monument classifying Karl Marx as *pater familias*, I will now focus on the life story of Jenny von Westphalen, before more briefly touching upon the lives of her lifelong friend and housekeeper Helena Demuth and her youngest daughter Eleanor «Tussy» Marx.



Fig. 4: The Marx monument is actually a family grave (Image: Dolores Zoë Bertschinger 2017).

Jenny von Westphalen was Marx's beloved wife and his partner for more than forty stormy years. Together with the Marx-Family the Westphalens belonged to the Protestant minority in Prussian Trier in the first half of the 19th century.<sup>22</sup> Jenny, her brother Edgar and Karl formed a «youngsters trio», educated and politically sensitized by her father Ludwig von Westphalen.<sup>23</sup> A first important social and political event was the July Revolution of 1830, that flashed over Germany in the following years. Jenny von Westphalen sympathised with the revolutionary literary group *Junges Deutschland* (Young Germany), that was also temporarily supported by a young man named Friedrich Oswald, later called Friedrich Engels. Jenny's and Karl's love caught fire when they were in their twenties and he returned for summer holidays from his studies in Berlin. In 1837 they were engaged despite Karl not being of Jenny's rank at all, which caused some familiar trouble.<sup>24</sup> Even before their marriage in 1843, Jenny von West-

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22 See Limmroth 2014, 46.

23 For an account of this young trio see Limmroth 2014, 54–57.

24 See on this and the following depiction Limmroth 2014, 60–72.

phalen played a significant role in Marx's political and philosophical agitation.<sup>25</sup> It was also her who saved parts of his early notes on Feuerbach: after yet another evening of games, alcohol and cigars, he drove up to Cologne but left behind parts of his manuscript. Jenny sent the notes after him, saying: «Now that you have torn into pieces your friend Ludwig (Feuerbach) you even left behind a heartpiece [*Herzblatt* lit. heartleaf]. [...] You certainly dawdled some more pages. It would be a crying shame. Mind your loose pages.»<sup>26</sup>

The Marx-couple spent the following forty years between Trier, Paris, Brussels and London. Jenny von Westphalen gave birth to seven children, of which only three survived the age of seven. She managed an unpretentious household and kept together a wide-ranging network of European intellectuals and socialists. Besides the family labour, Jenny worked as Karl's secretary and intellectual partner: she wrote part of his scientific work after his dictation, maintained his correspondence, often signing with his name.<sup>27</sup> Jenny was the only person who managed to transcribe Karl's hardly legible manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> She literally acted as his manager, chased her hus-

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25 During this time of long-distance relationship Karl received his dissertation in philosophy and Jenny undertook private studies and visited the theatre and opera, as well as attending lectures on mythology and art history. She studied the Ancient Greek language and read Hegel; see Limmroth 2014, 74. Finally, on 19th June 1843, Karl and Jenny married in a civil ceremony, which according to the Napoleonic Code would have been a valid contract. Jenny however wished for a church wedding and Karl did not disagree, although he was already an atheist; see Limmroth 2014, 81–82.

26 «Da hast Du den Freund Ludwig (Feuerbach) zerstückelt und ein Herzblatt hiergegessen. [...] Du hast doch gewiß noch mehr Blätter vertrödelt, Es wär' doch Jammer und schad. Hüt doch die losen Blätter» (Hecker/Limmroth 2014, 50, translation by the author). Jenny von Westphalen wrote this letter in Kreuznach to Karl Marx in Cologne, at the beginning of March 1843.

27 The Marx-Engels correspondence is considered to be one of the most intense and wide ranging of the 19th century and also Jenny's correspondence exceeds the number of over 329 documents edited by Hecker/Limmroth (2014). Only 25 of the letters between Jenny and Karl survived the selection undertaken by the Marx-daughters after their parents' death; see Hecker/Limmroth 2014, 15–17.

28 These include at least The Holy Family (1845), Poverty of Philosophy (1847), Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848), The Eighteenth Brumaire (1852), Critique of Political Economy (1859) and the biweekly article for The New York Daily Tribune; see Limmroth 2014, 160–161. It is said that the work on the Communist Manifesto was so pressing, that Karl dictated and Jenny wrote day and night; see Limmroth 2014, 12. This was a «classical» division of labour, as the examples of many other philosophers such as Mireva Einstein-Maric and Albert Einstein or Hans Blumenberg and his many «secretaries» show.

band back to his writing desk, and negotiated with publishers and sponsors. She found ways to send illegal pamphlets to fictitious addresses, took part in lively evenings and debates in her own living room or in one of the pubs that Marx, Engels and their entourage frequented almost daily, and attended meetings such as the foundation of the International Workingmen's Association.<sup>29</sup> «Someone who got to know Marx, normally also knew his wife Jenny»,<sup>30</sup> Limroth summarizes.

What the statement «beloved wife of Karl Marx» on the Marx monument neglects, is, that Jenny von Westphalen was an outstanding, independent person, socially, politically, and intellectually involved, always ready with a pithy opinion to put forward in meetings, letters and even articles.<sup>31</sup> Her correspondence, only published in 2014, reveals that she freely exchanged with the male socialist leaders and stayed in touch with numerous important women, among them Caroline Schöler, Bertha Markheim, Ernestine Liebkecht, and Felicitas Longuet. She also kept a lifelong friendship with Helena Demuth, who was not only a housekeeper but also the only person besides Jenny to criticize and defy the thin-skinned Karl.<sup>32</sup> And after all, it was one of the daughters, Eleanor «Tussy» Marx, who carried on Jenny's and Karl's legacy as a socialist writer and orator, feminist, translator and literary critic.<sup>33</sup> One may wonder, whether these women

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29 See Limmroth 2014, 164–166.

30 «Wer Marx kannte, der kannte in der Regel auch seine Frau Jenny» (Limmroth 2014, 167, translation by the author).

31 Some of her texts and letters were published in the newspaper *Vorwärts*; for information about Jenny's writing see Limmroth 2014, 218–221. Her theatre reviews can be found on [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org).

32 On Helena Demuth see Limmroth 2014, 149–157. She gives detailed insights into the circumstances and consequences of Karl and Helena Demuth's illegitimate son Henry Frederick Demuth.

33 After a hard-working but enriched life full of appreciation and popularity, Eleanor Marx committed suicide in 1898 with prussic acid; her ashes were kept for years in the Communist headquarters at King Street (perhaps one day they should be sent to Moscow), and finally seized by Scotland Yard when they raided King Street in 1921. Barker relates: «I caught up with Eleanor some thirty years later at the Marx Memorial Library in Clerkenwell when I chanced to ask the librarian if he had any idea what had happened to the ashes. «We have them right here,» he said [...]» (Barker 1984, 42). On November 23, 1954, when Marx's grave was relocated to its current site, Eleanor went to join her parent's grave. For more information on Eleanor Marx see Zimmermann 1984 and Fluss/Miller 2017. Eleanor Marx's speeches about the women and labour question, about her father's legacy and other socialist issues as well as all her literary translations can be found on [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org).

were actually the one's to make possible one of the most influential economic, political, and philosophical contributions to modernity. They lived their lives mainly on the invisible family side of society responsible for the reproductive labour, that neither Marx nor Engels considered as being part of the economic production and therefore of the revolutionary masses.<sup>34</sup> However, these women were part of the intellectual and agitative socialist movement of their époque. Jenny von Westphalen, Helena Demuth and Eleanor Marx were far more than a «beloved wife», housekeeper or «daughter of Karl Marx». They advanced the Marxist project in their very own ways.

### 3. *Ernestine L. Rose: The Freethinking Suffragette*

Leaving the Marx-Memorial, we enter the more overgrown part of East Highgate on a small path. Here, gravestones are weathered and cracked, ivy covered branches bar our way, and leaves rustle beneath our feet. Suddenly, in the midst of this enchanted graveyard, we discover a neat and clean grey marble slab. Its round arc shape contrasts with the rectangular tombstone, on which visitors have put stones and coins, and the wind has swept on leaves (fig. 5).

Here we can read the names of two declared freethinkers: Ernestine L. Susmond Potowski Rose and William Ella Rose. He is called a silversmith and reformer, Ernestine a «womens rights and anti-slavery advocate». Looking at this tombstone one gets the impression that an important woman is buried here, who did not only outlast her husband by ten years but even overlies him by the sheer number of designations and activities. In fact, this tombstone was restored in 2002 by the Ernestine Rose Society to ensure that this «courageous and pioneering woman [...] would no longer rest in an unmarked grave.»<sup>35</sup> This act is not as trivial as it may seem at first sight. Although Ernestine L. Rose was a founding figure of the American suffragette movement and the most eloquent and well known of the women's rights activists at the time, «today virtually no one knows her name.»<sup>36</sup> As we will discover, Rose's invisibility has much to do with religion.

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34 It was only with Second-wave feminism that family and care work was discussed as part of production and therefore working class struggles; see Dalla Costa 1973.

35 <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rose-ernestine> (accessed July 30, 2017).

36 Kolmerten 1999, xvii. An example of the omission of Rose is the otherwise very informative article by Young, «Women's Place in American Politics. The Histori-



*Fig. 5: Ernestine Rose's gravestone with extensive inscriptions. The stones on the slab relate to Ernestine Rose's Jewish origin, whilst placing coins on a grave relate to ancient Greek practices, but it might also be a way of funding the maintenance of the grave by the Ernestine Rose Society (Image: Dolores Zoé Bertschinger 2017).*

Ernestine Louise Sousmond Potowski (or Sigismund Potowsky) was born as a daughter of a rabbi on January 13, 1810, in Poland.<sup>37</sup> At the age of 17 she evaded her betrothal and fled to Berlin.<sup>38</sup> In 1829 she moved to London, travelling at least once to France, where she participated in the

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cal Perspective» (1976). Rose is mentioned in FN 230, p. 308, but is otherwise strangely absent in the whole article. Kolmertén (1999, xvii) calls Rose together with Virginia Woolf a «stranded ghost».

37 On birth and childhood see Kolmertén 1999, 4–7. Kolmertén also suggest that Ernestine was not Rose's actual birthname for it is neither a Jewish nor a Polish name, but that Rose instead named herself Ernestine probably when migrating to London in 1829; see Kolmertén 1999, 6–7 and 9.

38 According to d'Hericourt, Rose's first biographer, Rose attended an interview with the king of Prussia about the right of Polish Jews to remain in Berlin. Rose's only opportunity on that matter was to convert to Protestantism, however, she supposedly told the king: «I have not abandoned the trunk to latch onto the branches» (Kolmertén 1999, 9).

revolution of July 1830.<sup>39</sup> In London Ernestine came into contact with Owenism<sup>40</sup> and certainly read one of its affiliated newspapers, the *Pioneer*, published by James and Frances Morrison. The Morrison's actively demanded women's rights, equal education opportunities and access to equal wages. They even spoke of a union for women consulting their own affairs.<sup>41</sup> Ernestine became a member of Owen's Association of *All Classes of All Nations* (AACAN) in 1835 and it must have been in this context that she met her future husband William Rose.<sup>42</sup> They were married in a civil ceremony in a rather simple setting in Ernestine's room.<sup>43</sup> Shortly after, they decided to move to one of the Owenite colonies in New York.

Arriving in New York in 1836 the Roses entered a city of economic unrest, riots, and strikes shortly before the 'Panic of 1837'. It was a time when religious reform movements such as the temperance or the evangelically underpinned abolitionist movement flourished, since they allowed women to work together in the public sphere and forwarded a network of women's activities.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, even when Rose first turned to the freethinking reformers, she found an outstanding woman there: Frances Wright, the first woman in the US ever to speak publicly on the equality of the sexes and it soon turned out to be her «most influential foremother».<sup>45</sup> On June 3, 1837, Rose spoke for the first time at a weekly gathering of freethinkers, and by the Fall she repeated these talks on socialism and the evils of private property on a monthly basis.<sup>46</sup> Ten years later she was engaged in constant travel, lecturing throughout the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>47</sup>

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39 See Kolmerten 1999, 9–10. In a letter written in 1856, Rose recalls, that she had seen «the glass shattered at the Louvre after the 1830 demonstrations» (Kolmerten 1999, 10). There is a connection here with Jenny von Westphalen, who followed these events as a teenager from Trier.

40 Owenism was an early socialist movement initiated by Robert Owen, a successful manager of New Lanark mills, who created a social movement that emphasized individual liberty and organized itself in cooperatives, trade unions and socialistic communities. Owenism was pastiched by philosophers of the Enlightenment and utilitarians. See Kolmerten 1999, 10–13.

41 On the Morrissions see Kolmerten 1999, 14–16.

42 See Kolmerten 1999 17–19.

43 See Kolmerten 1999, 19.

44 See on women's networks and reform movements Kolmerten 1999, 20–24.

45 Kolmerten 1999, 27. On Rose's memory of Wright see Kolmerten 1999, 35.

46 See Kolmerten 1999, 33–34.

47 «Health problems» was the only appropriate reason for a woman to travel on her own across the States in those days and Rose used this label for her own freedom of travel; see Kolmerten 1999, 56. On the arduous travels she undertook as inexpensively as she could see also Kolmerten 1999, 157–158.



Rose was multilingual in many ways: she spoke Polish, German and English and gave talks about anti-slavery as well as freethinker's and women's rights platforms.<sup>48</sup> She instructed the Owenite audience on «The Science of Government»<sup>49</sup> or «Antagonism in Society».<sup>50</sup> To the abolitionist and women's rights movement she lectured on «The Educational and Social Position of Women» or on «The Civil and Political Rights of Women».<sup>51</sup> Rose must have had an extraordinary appearance on stage, at least her look was commented upon in newspapers up until old age. Her curly open hair, the ever-present white gloves and the neat dark dresses, her «graceful» voice with accent – all these features were either loved or exoticized and marginalized.<sup>52</sup> During her lectures Rose used to speak in a steady voice, walking up and down the stage, and stopping at intervals to look at her audience. She was able to talk for hours in a row without notes.<sup>53</sup> Her speeches were of surpassing rhetorical force, she attacked specific people and arguments, and reacted spontaneously, «quick, and often sarcastic»<sup>54</sup> to her audience's objections. A journalist of the *Boston Investigator* wrote on Rose's lecture at the Philadelphia National Convent in October 1854 that «by her accustomed ability and dignity [she] gave character and importance to the meeting, while her able advocacy was felt by all present.»<sup>55</sup> By speaking in front of many different audiences she developed an impressive personality that none of the other women possessed. It made her one of the major intellectual forces behind the American women's rights movement.<sup>56</sup>

To the women's rights movement Rose added her own freethinking perspective and enriched the already heterogeneous group. Kolmerten highlights Rose as *the* example against «an erroneous historical image»,<sup>57</sup> according to which the suffragettes are depicted as «one body of women». Ernestine Rose was not a native, upper class, pious and decent American woman but Polish with Jewish background who voted against the separation of women's and abolitionist's matters and did not hide her freethink-

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48 On her «multilingualism» see Kolmerten 1999, 40.

49 Kolmerten 1999, 56.

50 Kolmerten 1999, 57.

51 Kolmerten 1999, 145.

52 See Kolmerten 1999, 3, 147, and 159; Kolmerten also speaks of Rose having suffered «unstated anti-semitic prejudice» (1999, 126).

53 See Kolmerten 1999, 101, 147, and 170.

54 Kolmerten 1999, 117.

55 Kolmerten 1999, 163; on praise for Rose's rhetorical talent see also 137.

56 See Kolmerten 1999, xvii and 117.

57 Kolmerten 1999, 64.

ing opinion. Against many of her co-leaders of the movement, Rose did not rest herself on the island of «women's nature» or «women's sphere». This «refusal to buy into masculine or feminine essences» set her «apart from many of her contemporaries and seems to make her a denizen of the 1990s.»<sup>58</sup> Consistently, Rose not only propagated women's suffrage but human rights «irrespective of sex, country or color»,<sup>59</sup> as she used to put it. It was this main point of «universal suffrage» that separated Rose from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the other two major leaders of the women's movement. Anthony, in particular, took on more and more racist arguments over the course of time, advocating women's rights *against* the rights of black men.<sup>60</sup> But for Rose universal suffrage was not to be debated – it simply was a moral and logical imperative – and she did not hesitate to challenge her campaigners on stage.<sup>61</sup> She knew, that she was «severe alike on friends and foes» expressing her opinions, and «it is because in principle I know no compromise.»<sup>62</sup>

Beside gender and race essentialism Rose also questioned that religion is a naturally given fact. In this she followed enlightenment's reasoning, which held that belief does not derive from divine inspiration but rather from education, environment and experience. Consequently, she also refused spiritualism that came of age at the end of the 1850s even in her own Owenite movement.<sup>63</sup> She publicly argued against the authority of the Scriptures and shocked her audience: «In 1853 few women lectured publicly; even fewer questioned the tenets of Christianity».<sup>64</sup> Rose proceeded with provocations about religion, twice filling a hall of 1600 people! With increasing tensions in the suffragette movement in the 1860s Rose immersed herself again in freethinking. Two days before Fort Sumter and the

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58 Kolmerten 1999, 101 and 243 on essentialism in women's suffrage movement.

59 See Kolmerten 1999, 110, 111, 181, and 235.

60 See Kolmerten 1999, 136; on the relationships between the three agitators see 133–134, 149–154, and 217–222.

61 See Kolmerten 1999, 77–78, and 96–97.

62 Kolmerten 1999, 181. Rose wrote this quote in a farewell letter when leaving New York in 1856 for a vacation to Europe. She had literally lectured herself into exhaustion: within twenty years she had lectured in 23 states, often giving more than one speech a day. She was a celebrity and everyone knew what she looked like; see Kolmerten 1999, 183. On her increased newspaper coverage due to her tireless travelling activities see Kolmerten 1999, 158, on her national success also 163.

63 See Kolmerten 1999, 186, and 204–206, especially 206.

64 Kolmerten 1999, 105. «Rose, as a nonbeliever, shocked her audience merely by the fact of her disbelief.» Kolmerten 1999, 126.

beginning of the Civil War she held a lecture entitled «A Defense of Atheism» that became her most famous one.<sup>65</sup>

According to Kolmerten, Rose never looked for the companionship of other women activists outside of the conventions. Rather she found the sympathy and friendship she needed with her freethinking friends and especially her husband.<sup>66</sup> William Rose remained in their first apartment in Lower East Side, New York, and provided Ernestine emotional comradeship and financial security as a skilled craftsman and money-raiser behind the scenes.<sup>67</sup> It is not by chance that the one repeated term on the Rose's tombstone is «freethinker». The movement was Ernestine's backup to be able to push the women's and abolitionist's issues with unforeseen comfort and strength until the interruption of Civil War. At the same time it might also have been her loyalty to the freethinking movement that sealed her fate in being the one suffragette leader forgotten in US-American women's history, as Kolmerten suspects.<sup>68</sup> A striking example of Rose's absence can be found in the Washington Capitol: the women's rights memorial in the Capitol's rotunda shows Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott (fig. 6).<sup>69</sup>

Anthony and Mott were both born into Quaker families, Mott was even a Quaker preacher. Stanton was the author of the first *Women's Bible*, published in two volumes in 1895 and 1898.<sup>70</sup> Behind the three marble busts there is a rough-hewn marble at the top of the sculpture, as if the artist Adelaide Johnson left the artwork unfinished. This marble piece silently marks the invisible atheist legacy that Rose represents in US-American history. However, the newly arranged tombstone at Highgate Cemetery is surely a first step of recovery and acceptance: recovering a buried part of women's rights history and accepting the (religious) plurality and controversy that characterized the suffragette movement.

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65 See Kolmerten 1999, 231.

66 See Kolmerten 1999, 208.

67 On many occasions Ernestine acted as major speaker while William was the organizer; on this teamwork see Kolmerten 1999, xxiv, 39 and 41. Whereas Luce Stone or Antoinette Brown were always paid for their lectures, Rose never sought personal gain; see Kolmerten 1999, 182.

68 See Kolmerten 1999, xviii; and Aston 2015.

69 Images of the sculpture can be found on <https://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/other-statues/portrait-monument> (accessed November 19, 2018).

70 Stanton 1999.



Fig. 6: *The women's rights memorial in the Washington Capitol's rotunda shows Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott (Image: Wikimedia Commons).*<sup>71</sup>

#### 4. Anna Mahler: *The Restless Sculptress*

Returning to the main entrance of Highgate East cemetery we pass by a unique tombstone: the sculpture of a tiny woman covering her face with both hands. Despite the small height of the figure she seems long and tall. This impression is reinforced by a tight dress that adumbrates bosom and waist and reaches the statue's feet in pleats. Likewise toes and fingers are clearly carved out and even the straight forearm is designed decisively. The petite woman has a dynamic expression although she hides her face – a gesture we might interpret as sadness, fear or shame. The delicate hands do not cover the whole face but leave the forehead blank. We can almost sense her eyes. Her intention might be to play hide and seek. Whether happy or sad, the statue indicates the dual meaning of an impossible gaze: the statue stands in public, but because she does not want to look, we also cannot see her completely (fig. 7).

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71 <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/89/PortraitMonument.jpg> (accessed May 12, 2018).

At the bottom of the sculpture we read the name of «Anna Mahler / sculptor / 1904–1988». Anna Justine Mahler was the daughter of the famous composer Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) and the ingenious «show-woman» Alma Mahler-Werfel (1879–1964).<sup>72</sup> She grew up in a stimulating environment in Vienna at the turn of the century. She showed many talents already in her early years. At the age of seven she was able to read notes, even sight-read, and played the piano, the cello, and the violin as well.<sup>73</sup> As a teenager she started drawing and painting and developed her skills as a sculptor in her thirties<sup>74</sup> – a profession she would not abandon throughout her lifetime marked by the Second World War, exile and countless travels all over Europe, the United States and even China. I will shed light on Anna Mahler's restless life by highlighting three aspects that are related to her tombstone on Highgate: the eyes, the body and the notion of hide and seek.

Little Anna's appearance was marked by big blue eyes, thus her parents called her «Guckerl» or «Gucki» (German: *gucken*, to see ).<sup>75</sup> Elias Canetti wrote about her: «Anna was entirely enclosed in her eyes and apart from that nearly mute, her voice, although deep and low, never meant anything to me.»<sup>76</sup> Even her late friend Herta Blaukopf begins her account of Anna with the impression of her eyes: «When I saw Anna Mahler for the first time, I noticed immediately her bright, very big eyes, with which she seemed to see more than other people.»<sup>77</sup> Anna Mahler herself remembers that she often felt lonely as a child surrounded by all the grown-ups in her mother's mansion – so she started to observe and to draw all these «inter-

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72 After the death of her first husband Gustav, Alma Mahler was married a further three times, to the painter and writer Oskar Kokoschka, the architect and founder of Bauhaus Walter Gropius, and the author Franz Werfel; see Weidle 2004a, 9. Moreover, Alma Mahler kept a network of artist, intellectuals and politicians, mostly of the Austrian Ständestaat, that later led the country into the Third Reich; on these relations see Hilmes 2004.

73 See Weidle 2004a, 14.

74 On painting and sculpting see Weidle 2004a, 18; and Weidle 2004b, 58.

75 See Weidle 2004a, 9.

76 «Anna war ganz in den Augen enthalten und sonst beinahe stumm, ihre Stimme, obwohl sie tief war, hat mir nie etwas bedeutet» (Seeber 2004, 153, translation by the author). Canetti got to know Anna Mahler in 1933 and was so fascinated by Anna's eyes that he entitled the third part of his autobiography *Augenspiel* after her «play of eyes»; see Blaukopf 2004, 144, and Seeber 2004, 154.

77 «Als ich Anna Mahler zum erstenmal sah, fielen mir gleich ihre hellen, sehr großen Augen auf, mit denen sie mehr wahrzunehmen schien als andere» (Blaukopf 2004, 144, translation by the author). Herta Blaukopf is the author of the collected letters of Gustav Mahler.



Fig. 7: Anna Mahler's tomb with the characteristic female figure; the origin of the statue is unknown (Image: Dolores Zoé Bertschinger 2017).

esting people».<sup>78</sup> Her eyes as windows to the world enabled Anna Mahler to communicate in her very own way: her oeuvre covers 206 objects,<sup>79</sup> its main motifs are the (female) body and especially faces. Her portraits of composers, authors and politicians in clay, stone, and bronze are the peak of her artistic work, for Anna Mahler was able to see more than a «non-artist» was able to see, as she described it.<sup>80</sup> It was her way to encounter the distinguished company in her mother's mansion face to face and not only as the daughter of the famous composer Mahler. It was due to her ability of observing and seeing people, that she encountered them at eye level.

Both, her mother Alma Mahler-Werfel as well as Anna Mahler, were women of exceeding beauty and sensational appearance.<sup>81</sup> And both wom-

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78 «Ins Haus meiner Mutter kamen viele interessante Menschen, und da ich mich unter ihnen allein fühlte, begann ich, sie zu zeichnen» (Weidle 2004d, 169).

79 Since all of her early works were destroyed during World War II this figure is only an estimation; see Weidle 2004d, 206.

80 See Weidle 2004d, 210. Anna Mahler published her ideas on art and aesthetics in the essay *Die Gestalt des Menschen in der Kunst* in 1962; see Weidle 2004d, 207.

81 See for example Anna Mahler's depiction of her mother in Weidle 2004a, 25.

en enjoyed their reputation as *femmes fatales* without compromise.<sup>82</sup> In contrast to her mother Alma, Anna did not hesitate to engage in the most physical act of sculpting with stone. It was the hardness, the resistance of the material, that challenged her and to which she responded with the force of her own body. «My sculpting is a discipline in which you need everything: the body, intelligence, and feeling.»<sup>83</sup> It seems that Anna Mahler never shied away, even from dead bodies. At the age of three her sister Maria passed away, also her father Gustav Mahler died when Anna was only five years old.<sup>84</sup> At the age of 24 she witnessed the death of Lili Schnitzler,<sup>85</sup> who had shot herself. Anna took care of the dying teenager and even carried her coffin to the grave.<sup>86</sup> When her beloved half-sister Manon Gropius suffered from polio, Anna witnessed her dying process, and made a death mask of Manon's face.<sup>87</sup> This was also the case with the composer Arthur Schönberg, whom she portrayed shortly before his death in 1951.<sup>88</sup> Anna Mahler's fascination with the human body, was part of a larger movement in European art history, including Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol, and Franz Wotrubas, that focused on the shape and volume of bodies.<sup>89</sup> What was extraordinary in Mahler's work, especially concerning female bodies, is formal simplicity paired with a hermetic inwardness, as though the human body serves only as a cover for the embodiment of something transcendent.<sup>90</sup>

Her origin made Anna Mahler a celebrity during the 1920s in Vienna. As *the* daughter of Mahler she remained a requested person even after her emigration to Los Angeles in 1950. Her name was boon and bane. On the

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- 82 See Weidle 2004b, 61. Alma Mahler-Werfel was married four times and divorced three times, Anna Mahler went through five marriages (with conductor Rupert Koller, composer Ernst Krenek, publisher Paul Zsolnay, conductor Anatole Fistoulari, and screenwriter Albrecht Joseph) but found herself again and again wanting to stay independent and on her own; see Weidle 2004c, 142–143. For more information about her character and way of life see also the novel *Nachwelt. Ein Reisebericht* (1999), a work by Marlene Streeruwitz, dedicated to Anna Mahler.
- 83 «Meine Bildhauerei ist eine Disziplin, in der man alles braucht: den Körper, Intelligenz, Gefühl» (Weidle 2004d, 168, translation by the author). In fact, when her mentor Fritz Wotrubas first suggested to her to work with stone she doubted that a woman of her figure and size could actually do it; see Weidle 2004d, 176.
- 84 See Weidle 2004a, 10.
- 85 Daughter of author and dramatist Arthur Schnitzler; see Weidle 2004b, 50.
- 86 See Weidle 2004b, 52.
- 87 See Weidle 2004b, 63.
- 88 See Weidle 2004c, 135.
- 89 See Weidle 2004d, 177–179.
- 90 For an interpretation of Anna Mahler's work see Weidle 2004d, 210–214.

one hand she enjoyed the attention and kept her birth name through all of her five marriages.<sup>91</sup> And she never hesitated to give her name for a good cause, for example to the Committee of the Austrian Centre in exile in London in 1939, together with Sigmund Freud.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, she tried to keep her life private, was introverted and preferred to live and work independently.<sup>93</sup> When Anna invited friends to her place, she used to work in her studio until the very last second, and only changed her dress rapidly to welcome the guests. Her notable status put her under so much pressure, that she even disappeared beneath the table on one occasion when one of her guests attempted to drink to her at a birthday party.<sup>94</sup> Escaping and hiding were a major topic in Anna Mahler's life. She tried to escape her marriage to Paul Zsolnay in 1931, and it was in this time of hiding, that Anna Mahler started to develop her skills as a sculptor.<sup>95</sup> Ultimately her future husband found her and kept her in a place near Vienna. Anna Mahler's restless lifestyle, her ever changing home places, can be interpreted as an attempt not to be found. Anna herself said, it was no problem for her to move again and again, because: «I am at home in myself.»<sup>96</sup>

Having considered Anna Mahler's biography, we should take another look at the petite woman in Highgate Cemetery. Knowing about Anna's paradoxical lifestyle as one of Vienna's celebrities and at the same time her being an artist who never gained full recognition, we now can detect a conflict between the petite woman's presence in the world (being seen) and the instinctive gesture of hiding (not to be seen). The woman is hiding her face but at the same time she seems to wonder, whether we look at her or not – maybe she even peeks through her fingers? Even if we reconsider a possible gesture of weeping, we cannot tell whether she is crying or just recovering from grief. Although the bronze statue is firm and bound to its place, it seems on the edge of moving its feet. In all this ambiguity it almost seems to be too much of a coincidence, that we do not know whether this petite woman is part of Anna Mahler's own oeuvre. All things

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91 Therefore she can be recognized as a Mahler-offshoot even in death, as her tombstone indicates.

92 She also designed a tombstone for Freud, that was never realized; see Weidle 2004d, 193; on Anna Mahler's time in Exile and her being more a kind of «figure head» than a political agitator see Weidle 2004c, 121–123.

93 For example Anna Mahler never tried to connect to other sculptors although she kept in contact with many different artists; see Weidle 2004d, 203.

94 Anyway, she preferred people visiting her in her studio so as not to leave her universe; see Weidle 2004b, 60–62.

95 See Weidle 2004b, 57–58.

96 Hurworth 2004, 37.



considered, the bronze woman fits perfectly into Anna Mahler's collection of female sculptures that are «in the world without taking part».<sup>97</sup>

### 5. Radclyffe Hall: The Spiritist Writer

Emerging from this biographical sketch of an almost forgotten sculptress, we enter West Highgate to find another group of female artists. The impressive Egyptian Avenue leads us to the architectural heart of the Cemetery, the Circle of Lebanon. A huge cedar tree at its centre is circled by a small number of chambers, which designate their exclusive status.<sup>98</sup> Going around the low levelled circle our view is channelled along the mossy chamber walls. In this dark grey atmosphere our eye catches sight of orange lilies and yellow roses in front of a vault's black iron door. The flower vase stands on a memorial stone with the engraved name of Radclyffe Hall. Above the gate we can read the name of Mabel Veronica Batten and on the left side of the door-frame we find a marble plaque saying: «Radclyffe Hall / 1943 /... and, if God choose, / I shall but love thee better / after death. / Una.» (figs. 8 and 9).

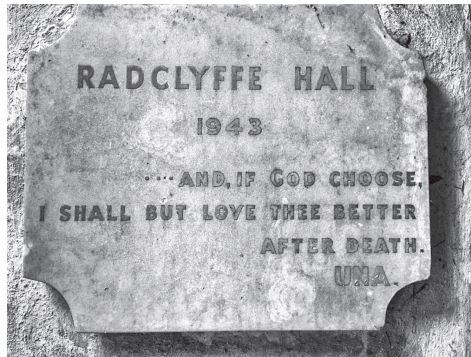
The arrangement on this vault presents a triangular relationship of unequal condition: three names put on three different levels. Researching the story of this grave, I discovered that the names do not even reveal the legal identities of Radclyffe and Una. So who were these individuals, what kind of connection did they have and why do people still lay down freshly cut flowers?<sup>99</sup>

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97 See Weidle 2004d, 206. Even after repeated visits I was not able to find the name of the sculptress or sculptor on the gravestone; also the literature about Anna Mahler provides no indication of the tombstone's origin.

98 Initially 20 chambers were built but these «proved so popular that, 40 years after the inner circle was constructed, an outer circle of 16 more vaults was built [...]» (Bulmer 2014, 33). One of these newly established vaults was adapted as a Columbarium (deposit of cremated remains) in 1894. On the Circle of Lebanon see also Barker 1984, 13–14.

99 As I am merely interested in the personalities and relationships of the three protagonists I draw heavily on Baker's *Our Three Selves. The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (1985). For a recent publication see Souhami 2013 and the Chapter on Hall in Fest 2009.



Figs. 8 and 9: *The tomb of Mabel Veronica Batten and Radclyffe Hall; after Hall's death Una Troubridge had the marble plaque placed by the entrance (Images: Dolores Zoé Bertschinger 2017).*

Mabel Veronica Batten was already in her fifties, when she met the 27 year old Radclyffe in 1907.<sup>100</sup> She was one of the leading amateur singers of her days, «at once bohemian and bourgeois»,<sup>101</sup> her nickname «Ladye» emphasises her double role. During this time Marguerite Antonia Radclyffe-Hall had just published her first collection of poems *Twixt Earth and Stars* (1906) and had already lived through several love affairs with women.<sup>102</sup> Although it seems to have been love at first sight, Mabel's and Radclyffe's relationship developed slowly. But when they went on a holiday to Belgium, the two «who left England as friends came back as lovers.»<sup>103</sup> It was Ladye who changed «Marguerite» into «John»,<sup>104</sup> a nickname she kept throughout her lifetime. John willingly adopted Mabel's habit of travelling widely throughout Europe – and also her conservative standpoint as a

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100 Mable Batten was born in India in 1856 and lived there with her husband George and daughter Cara until 1882, when they moved to England and Mabel started her singing career; see Baker 1985, 34–35.

101 Baker 1985, 33.

102 Baker 1985 mentions Agnes Nicholls (23–25), and Radclyffe's US-American cousins Jane Randolph (25–26) and Dorothy Diehl (26–27).

103 Baker 1985, 36.

104 Probably she named her after her great-grandfather; see Baker 1985, 47.

monarchist and patriot.<sup>105</sup> Against their Catholic views Mabel and John both advocated the Divorce Law reform and took a philanthropic interest in prostitution as it affected women.<sup>106</sup> They were attracted by the women's rights movement and shared friends with suffragettes such as Emmeline Pankhurst, Winnaretta Singer, Ethel Smythe and Violet Hunt. However, Mabel and John never actively joined the suffragette movement. After a demonstration in front of Parliament on 4th March 1912, Radclyffe even declared herself (anonymously) a «former suffragist» in a letter published in *The Times*.<sup>107</sup> John kept traditional gender views throughout her lifetime and promoted patriarchal relations and family models in her literary work, a reason why many feminists and lesbians already at the time declined her accounts of lesbian love.<sup>108</sup>

On 1st August 1915, John and Ladye met Una Troubridge at a party in Cambridge.<sup>109</sup> Una – real name, Margit Elena Gertrude Taylor – was a «professional artist of proven reputation»<sup>110</sup> and it is in her that we find yet another sculptress.<sup>111</sup> Mutual admiration of each other's work set the pattern for Radclyffe and Unas friendship that slowly but surely led into a love affair right under Ladye's eyes.<sup>112</sup> In 1916 Una even moved into the same Hotel where Ladye and Radclyffe stayed. Nearly 60 years of age, Ladye's fragile state of health declined even more, feeling sick at heart. After

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105 Rumour had it that Mabel enjoyed an affair with Edward VII before he became king and she always took close interest in his activities; see Baker 1985, 33, 37 and 39. An example of Radclyffe and Mabel's political position is their engagement in the recruitment of men to enlist for World War I. John wrote the leaflets and together they drove around the district distributing them. «Neither woman had near relatives at the front, so their experience of the conflict remained essentially vicarious» (Baker 1985, 55.) In World War II they even sided with the Fascists; Baker 1985, 140–141. For Radclyffe calling herself Conservative see Baker 1985, 246.

106 See Baker 1985, 48.

107 See Baker 1985, 49. Baker continues on Radclyffe's feminism being «at best ambiguous, her sympathies complicated by her curiously divided nature. She saw herself increasingly as a man trapped in a woman's body. Accordingly, she tended to identify primarily with men» (49), a statement that seems far too simplistic in the light of recent developments in gender, queer and transgender theory that perceives gender as a complex configuration outside of a heteronormative framework.

108 See Baker 1985, 191–192, 218–219, and 248–249; see also Pusch 1993.

109 See Baker 1985, 61–62.

110 Baker 1985, 72.

111 At the age of only 13 Una won a scholarship to start her career in modelling in clay. On Una's childhood and artistic development see Baker 1985, 63–64.

112 See Baker 1985, 72–75.

a quarrelsome dinner Ladye felt unwell and fainted, never recovering fully again. She died on 25 May 1916 and was buried at Highgate. After the mourning of Ladye's death, it was their fascination for *en vogue* spiritualism that brought Una and Radclyffe back together.<sup>113</sup> The well-known Mrs. Osborne Leonard became Radclyffe's lifelong medium to stay in touch with «her Ladye». At the second séance with Mrs Leonard, Radclyffe invited Una to take notes.<sup>114</sup> This marked the beginning of an «extraordinary triangular relationship»:<sup>115</sup> Ladye became both idol and ultimate arbiter for Una and John and every house they lived in turned partly into a shrine with photographs and mementos of Ladye.<sup>116</sup> Following Una's memories in *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall* (1945) Ladye even predicted that John would pass away before Una.<sup>117</sup>

John died on 7 October 1943 from cancer whereupon Una buried her in Ladye's vault and had the marble plate placed at the doorframe. In 1918 John had already obtained permission that Una may be buried with her and Ladye in the vault at Highgate.<sup>118</sup> However, Una lived for another twenty years and died in Rome in 1963. Her will, according to which she would have completed the «holy trinity»<sup>119</sup> with Ladye and John, was found too late – she was buried at Verano Cemetery. Today, one can only guess the reasons for the flowers at Ladye and John's grave . There might indeed be «[m]odern-day admirers of the novelist[, that] regularly lay freshly cut flowers at the vault's doors».<sup>120</sup> Or there might be some people who pay respect to an extraordinary chapter of lesbian relationships in women's history.

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113 After the controversial night that caused Ladye's blackout John was driven by guilt and she desperately wanted to know whether Ladye blamed her for her death or not; see Baker 1985, 84.

114 On these first sessions see Baker 1985, 88–94, who gives detailed records of the conversations.

115 Baker 1985, 3.

116 Moreover, the sessions at Mrs. Leonhards was John and Una's entry ticket into the Society for Psychical Research. Una and John published their séances notes as research papers on the accuracy of Mrs. Leonhards revelations, they recorded instances of telepathy occurring between themselves and observed lights, which Ladye explained to them to be the sign that she was watching over them; see Baker 1985, 104–105.

117 See Baker 1985, 338.

118 See Baker 1985, 118.

119 Baker 1985, 3.

120 Bulmer 2014, 33.

## 6. *The Image as Practice for a Feminist Imaginary*

This contribution has provided concise glimpses into the multi-faceted lives of Jenny von Westphalen, Ernestine L. Rose, Anna Mahler and Radclyffe Hall including Mable Batten and Una Troubridge. Our walk through Highgate Cemetery started at the gate of theoretical reflection on the feminist imaginary, as Naranch and Castoriadis understand it. Except for Rose, none of the four women were actively involved in the women's or even suffragette movement. Von Westphalen and Hall had a public voice insofar as their articles were published in newspapers. But none of these women were involved in established political institutions of their times and nation states. They were, to repeat Castoriadis' words, women who «twenty-four hours a day, in the home, at work, in the kitchen, in bed, in the street, in relation to children, to their husbands» have transformed the situation of women in society. Although I fully agree with Castoriadis in his estimation of the women's movement, there is one thing he overlooked: women did not only transform their situation in relation to their children and husbands, but in relation to their mothers, daughters, female friends, lovers and suffragist companions as well. Looking at the biographies of the four women, one has to admit that women always interrelated with other women and most often these relationships were decisive for their ways of life.

Jenny von Westphalen had many penfriends and maintained close relationships with the *grandes dames* of her time such as Georges Sand as well as her daughters Laura and Tussy. Ernestine L. Rose shared stages and exchanged arguments with other suffragettes almost all of her life. In a psychologically complex way Anna Mahler's biography was shaped by the relationship to her mother Alma Mahler-Werfel. And while she preferred working on her own, she created her own very unique group of female companions and surrounded herself with numerous female statues. Finally, the short glimpse into the lives of Hall, Batten and Troubridge already made it evident that these three cannot be reduced to their *ménage à trois*, but maintained connections to many different women all over Europe. Through letters, travel and the arts all of the portrayed women kept women's networks alive, that were far more extensive than the keyword «women's movement» suggests. In view of these far-reaching networks, the vaults in Highgate seem like knots that can serve as starting point for rediscovering the contribution of women to our common history. It is our own decision, whether we go on a pilgrimage to visit Marx's grave in Highgate Cemetery, or whether we undertake an unforeseen journey to remember

the «longest revolution»<sup>121</sup> (Juliette Mitchell) and honour these women in their own right.

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121 Mitchell 1984.

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# Remembering Karl Marx Image – Icon – Idol

*Baldassare Scolari*

«Enough of the lion's breast  
or lion's mane of Marx,  
the demonised dark-haired.»<sup>1</sup>

There are several photographs of Karl Marx, but one in particular has served as a model for countless images, paintings, posters, sculptures and other media artefacts: the portrait-photograph shot by John Mayall in 1875 in London. The Marx bust in the east side of Highgate Cemetery in London is one among many sculptures reproducing the well-known Marx *imago* as a middle-aged man with, in the words of Bertold Brecht, the «lion's mane». The Marx *imago* could be characterised as a «super-icon» in the sense that historian Gerhard Paul, referring to the official Mao portrait on Tiananmen Square, gives to this concept: «a paradigm for the characteristics of transculturality, transmediality and transtextuality [...], as well as in general for a re-iconisation [of images] [...], which at least partially assumes religious forms.»<sup>2</sup> Just like the Mao portrait, the Marx portrait has been reused, cited and provided with different functions in diverse historical and cultural contexts. It has functioned as a symbol for political identification, as an art object, a trademark, and, as we will see, even as a cult object or quasi-religious icon.<sup>3</sup>

The present essay is structured into four thematic sections. The first section will reconstruct the emergence, development and consolidation of the «Marx icon».<sup>4</sup> Here I will first broadly reconstruct the process that led to the iconisation of Marx's image and, second, the development of the «Marx cult» in the Soviet Union and East Germany. In the second section, the main focus will lie on the ambivalent use and reception of Marx's fig-

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1 Brecht 1967, 74 (translation by the author); German: «Genug von der Löwenbrust oder Löwenmähne Marxens, des verteufelten Mohrens!»

2 Paul 2013, 319 (translation by the author).

3 See Dühr 2013.

4 See Dühr 2013.

ure and thought in modern and contemporary society, which oscillates between the two poles of political engagement and commodification.<sup>5</sup> After that, the essay will focus on the history of Marx's burial place at Highgate Cemetery, paying particular attention to the erection of the Marx monument and how, over the years, the latter has become the pivot of a sort of necropolis of leftist activists and intellectuals. In this section, I will also discuss the thesis according to which certain cultural practices related to the Marx icon and more specifically the Marx memorial in Highgate Cemetery should be considered as religious or quasi-religious practices. In the last section, I will focus on the way in which Mike Leigh's film *High Hopes* deals with the problem and topic of the Marx memorialisation.

### 1. *The Iconisation of Karl Marx*

The 1875 Marx photograph by John Mayall shows the famous philosopher and economist at the age of 57, sitting on a chair with crossed legs, his right hand tucked inside his jacket and his left hand resting on his waist (fig. 1). Marx's face and expression, surrounded by long white hair and beard but with a still dark moustache, the only clue of the dark pigmentation that he had as a young man, already became iconic when he was still alive. Although there is a younger photo of him, at the age of 42, with graying hair but with a completely dark beard, the young Marx is – at least visually – a rather unknown being.

There are about 15 known photographs of Marx, which were mostly taken in London, and a few in other places, for example in Hannover on the occasion of the print of the first German edition of *Das Kapital*. Although there are only presumptions about the number of prints that were produced, several hints in letters suggest that they were numerous.<sup>6</sup> The exchange and despatch of photographs went beyond the family context, to which Friedrich Engels also has to be counted. In fact, not only companions and friends were addressed, but also competitors like Ferdinand Lassalle and his partner Sophie von Hatzfeld. From the beginning, the dissemination of images in the context of communication and letter culture went beyond a purely private character.

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5 Regarding the concept of commodification see Ertman/Williams 2005.

6 See Bouvier 2013, 13.

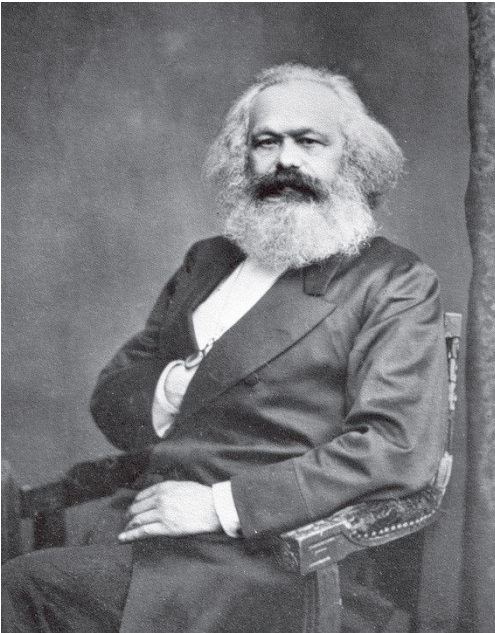


Fig. 1: Portrait-photograph by John Mayall, London, 1875  
(Image: Wikimedia Commons).<sup>7</sup>

As shown by the reactions of family members, the production and distribution of images was functional, beyond a mere private usage, to the disclosure of Marx's person and personality. When his daughter Laura received the photograph produced in 1867 in Hannover, she wrote to her father:

We liked Your photography immensely. Above all, I admire the eyes, the forehead and the expression: – the eyes have this real <villainous glitter> [German: *schurkischer Glitzer*] that I love so much in the original, and that is the only one of your photographs that simultaneously expresses sarcasm and goodness: a stranger, I think, would only see the good nature, but with my special <eagle eye>, I also see a bit of malice

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7 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl\\_Marx\\_001.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl_Marx_001.jpg) (accessed April 4, 2018).

[German: *Bosheit*] in the portrait, a malice that will undoubtedly scare your enemies.<sup>8</sup>

Marx answered with pleasure: «I am very glad that you liked my photograph so much. After all, my portrait is less disturbing than the original.»<sup>9</sup>

After the appearance of *Das Kapital* the demand for Marx's images grew significantly. Within the inner circle of Marx's confidants, there were different opinions on the subject of the dissemination and publication of the images. Engels, despite Marx's strong concerns, was absolutely convinced of the benefit of the publication of the images: «this type of advertisement penetrates the Philistine in his deepest bosom. So give him everything he needs», he wrote to Marx in 1868.<sup>10</sup> Marx was clearly less enthusiastic. When the publication of a biographical note accompanied by a photo in the magazine *Gartenlaube* did not materialise, Engels processed the text and published it in the daily newspaper *Die Zukunft* edited by Johann Jacoby. Marx let it happen but criticised the action in a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann: «because of your and Engels' opinion that the thing was useful, I gave in for the advertisement in the *Gartenlaube*. My conviction was *strongly against it*. Now I *urge* you to *give up* this fun *once and for all!*»<sup>11</sup>

The spread of Marx's images reached its peak in 1871 in the wake of the proclamation of the Paris Commune and, above all, because of the role assigned to Marx in it.<sup>12</sup> In connection with his activity within the General Council of the International Workingman's Association (IWA), which was founded in 1864, and because of Marx's apologia – known as *The Civil War in France* – of the Paris Commune after its bloody suppression in 1871, the conservative governments of Europe and the press represented him as a major culprit and «leader». When in the same year a hoax over his death caused excitement, the demand for pictures for press releases increased even more. Marx was now better known than ever and wanted – together with the family and Engels – to influence the *mise-en-scène* of his person: «the selection of the images provided [by Marx, his family members and

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8 Letter of Laura Marx to Karl Marx, 8.5.1867, in: Meier 1983, 51 (translation by the author).

9 Letter of Karl Marx to his daughter Laura Marx, 13.5.1867, in: Marx/Engels 1965, 548 (translation by the author).

10 Letter of Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, 2.2.1868, in: Marx/Engels 1974, 27 (translation by the author).

11 Letter of Karl Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 26.10.1868, in: Marx/Engels 1974, 573 (translation by the author, italics in original).

12 See Bouvier 2013, 16.

Engels] was as important as it was controlled, so that this process resulted in a kind of canonisation of the images.»<sup>13</sup>

This canonisation process was accompanied by written «life pictures» and «appreciations» in reference works and encyclopedias, which appeared already during Marx's lifetime. Perhaps the most important eulogy – at least in the light of its impact – is the one Engels wrote in 1877 for the *Braunschweiger Volks-Kalender* of the German Social Democracy.<sup>14</sup> Engels later referred again and again to this text, iterating its main assertions and statements after Marx's death, which did not focus much on biographical details, but rather on the weighting and appreciation of Marx's political action and intellectual work. Engels decisively shaped the reception of Marx and the construction of the icon.

The canonisation of Marx's «image» that Engels drew with words, was accompanied by a progressive iconisation of his visual image starting from 1883. In this year, the already mentioned photograph of John Mayall from 1875 became the definitive template for the Marx-icon. After Marx's death, Engels received requests from around the world and ordered 12,000 copies of the photo to be made available to newspapers and organisations. He justified the selection as follows: «It is the last, best shot, where the Moor appears in his cheerful, victorious olympic calm.»<sup>15</sup> As Beatrix Bouvier observes: «This image selection by Friedrich Engels had effects well into the 20th century, until today actually. It is always this photo template that makes the portrait of Karl Marx – in very different aesthetical forms – to the icon that is at the same time an «icon in the head.»<sup>16</sup>

A few decades after his death, Marx became the object of «Byzantine image worship» in the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup> His image was carried around in processions and was almost worshipped by thousands and his portrait shown at countless mass rallies. The Marx icon is unthinkable without Lenin's and above all Stalin's. As highlighted by Barabara Mikuda-Hüttel, the latter «is decisive for the cult around Marx, because with Stalin a quasi-religious image worship developed.»<sup>18</sup> This image worship was also taken up in East Germany, where the cult of Marx was particularly reflected in memorial art. Paradigmatic for it is Lew Kerbel's monument in Karl Marx

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13 Bouvier 2013, 17 (translation by the author).

14 See Marx/Engels 1987, 96–106.

15 Letter of Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein, 28.4.1883, in: Marx/Engels 1979, 18 (translation by the author).

16 Bouvier 2013, 18 (translation by the author).

17 See Mikuda-Hüttel 2013a, 21.

18 Mikuda-Hüttel 2013a, 21 (translation by the author).

City alias Chemnitz, which conveys «a political-physiognomic message [...] that, beyond epoch-making allocation and beyond political conviction, emphasises the charisma and the unflinching will as decisive characteristics of a power-conscious political protagonist»<sup>19</sup> (fig. 2). Lev Kerbel's monument then also served as a model for souvenirs, which were made in countless variations in metal, porcelain and plastic.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 2: Lew Kerbel's Karl Marx memorial in Chemnitz, formerly Karl-Marx-Stadt (Image: Wikimedia Commons).<sup>21</sup>

In East Germany and in the Soviet Union Marx's image became a fundamental element within practices and representations, which were functional to the legitimisation and the sustaining of what we might call «state mythologies.»<sup>22</sup> It is an irony of history that we find, in the writings of Marx and Engels, not only a clear and explicit denial of the possibility of realising communism within singular nation-states, but also an implicit prediction of their failure.<sup>23</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the de-

19 Sperling 2008, 14 (translation by the author).

20 See Mikuda-Hüttel 2013a, 26.

21 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl-Marx-Monument\\_in\\_Chemnitz.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl-Marx-Monument_in_Chemnitz.jpg) (accessed August 19, 2020).

22 Regarding the concept of «state mythology» see Cassirer 1946.

23 «Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples «all at once» and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of

feat of the Soviet Union and the unification of Germany, the Marx cult that served to legitimise communist state mythologies ended in a very short time. But the process of iconisation of Marx did not end with it, on the contrary; now that the «adversary» was defeated, now that «the ghost of communism» appeared no longer to haunt Europe, nothing more impeded the capitalist appropriation of Marx's image.

## 2. *The «Blind» Idolatrisation of Marx*

In the Eighties, a century after the death of Karl Marx, Marxism was clearly in political and intellectual decline. As historian Eric Hobsbawm – who is now buried a few metres away from Marx's grave – wrote in 2011, «there can be no doubt that for a quarter of a century Marx ceased to be regarded as a thinker relevant to the times, and in the greater part of the world Marxism was reduced to little more than the set of ideas of a slowly eroding corps of middle-aged and elderly survivors.»<sup>24</sup> The collapse of the USSR, the decomposition or the change in character of the non-state communist parties in Europe, the gradual demise of the age-group shaped by the experience of anti-fascism and World War II, the regression of Marxism among intellectuals caused in large part by a general mutation in the social and human sciences in the 1970 – all this and much more determined the decline of Marxism.<sup>25</sup>

Now that the thought and the figure of Marx seemed to have stopped affecting the emotions, actions and thoughts of many people around the globe, especially in Europe, they were no longer considered a great danger to the capitalist organisation of society and to the hegemonic economic and political discourse. Of course, even after the collapse of most communist regimes and the simultaneous crises of labour-based social democracy, the rhetoric of Cold War anti-communism continued, demonising the radical left and glorifying Western liberal democratic capitalism as the best of all possible economic and political systems.<sup>26</sup> However, now that the use of the figure with the lion's mane was no longer «monopolised» by states, parties, trade unions and more generally by people for whom, in one way or another, Marx was a reference figure that symbolised resistance to all

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productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them» (Marx/Engels 1998, 57).

24 Hobsbawm 2011, 385.

25 See Hobsbawm 2011, 385, 394.

26 See Hobsbawm 2011, 397–398.

forms of capitalist exploitations, the path for the figure's commodification was opened.

Marx's image and name have been widely used even by the advertising industry, and this already before the so-called New Media Age.<sup>27</sup> In a computer advert of 1984 the Apple brand promoted the Macintosh in West Germany. The advertising image displayed five objects: four books in rows with the names of Mao Zedong, Friedrich Engels, Wladimir Iljitsch Lenin and Karl Marx written on the cover, followed by a Macintosh. A text informs the reader how to interpret the advertising image: «It was about time that a capitalist also changes the world» (German: *Es wurde mal Zeit, dass mal ein Kapitalist die Welt verändert*).<sup>28</sup> Even more striking and, in some ways, ironic: in 2012, a photograph of Lew Kerbel's Karl Marx monument, which was inaugurated in 1971 in Chemnitz, a city renamed Karl-Marx-Stadt from 1953 to 1990, was chosen from a list of ten contenders to appear on a new issue of MasterCard by customers of the German bank Sparkasse of Chemnitz.<sup>29</sup> One need not be particularly imaginative to suppose that Marx would probably not have approved – despite his well-known sense of irony. There are several other examples of commercial and advertising uses of images of Marx – in most cases of John Mayall's famous photograph. If someone searches products on amazon or other similar online shops by typing the words «Karl Marx», he or she will find products of all sorts: Marx toys and dolls, posters, plastic sculptures, clocks, T-shirts, coffee mugs, posters and many other objects depicting or representing Marx in the well-known way: as a grey-bearded middle-age man with the «lion's mane».

The commodification of the Marx icon seems to exemplify what could be defined as an «idolatrour use» of the image of Karl Marx. Referring to the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, Hans Belting defines *eidola* those images that have lost any reference to the reality and truth that they simulate to represent, that is, those images that simulate a significance, while in reality they *signify only themselves*.<sup>30</sup> In other words, they have lost any reference to the reality that they should refer to. However, Hans Belting specifies,

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27 See Meier 2013, 31–37.

28 See Meier 2013, 34.

29 <https://boingboing.net/2012/07/03/karl-marx-on-a-mastercard.html> (accessed April 4, 2018).

30 See Belting 2005, 15–16.



[it is] not the individual products that are threatening us, but their continued production that seduces us to ‹blind› idolatry. [...] In the supposedly self-contained and inscrutable stream of images, there is one [...] instance that so much wants to hide its presence behind the images. It consists in the economic power that pushes the former role of political power into the background. The leading images [German: *Leitbilder*] that this power produces are therefore icons of consumption and no longer icons of political ideas or ideologies.<sup>31</sup>

Belting goes on to explain the difference between idolatry in past ages and idolatry today, in the contemporary world:

Idols were empty images under old premises, namely images without reference and without symbolic practice. Idolatry was synonymous with a worship of surfaces and visual illusions with which the idols faked the essence of the image. Can such a discourse be maintained? Images today demand our faith, but they are not made to convince us and destined to impress us. They arouse our attention with the intention to numb it.<sup>32</sup>

In the stream of images, controlled by the economic power, even Marx's image seems to become meaningless, without any reference to his thoughts and concepts, mutating into a pure means of entertainment or, more precisely, of mass distraction.<sup>33</sup>

Marx's image and thought, despite this process of meaning-emptying and capitalist appropriation, has never completely lost its ability to appeal and affect people politically. In fact, after a long story of leftists' disillusionment and demonisation of Marxism, in the last decade there have been

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31 Belting 2005, 18, 23 (translation by the author).

32 Belting 2005, 25 (translation by the author).

33 As David Harvey observes, this loss of interest in Marx's thought can also be observed in recent publications on his life and the historical context in which he lived: «In recent times there has been a flurry of comprehensive studies of Marx in relation to the personal, political, intellectual and economic milieu in which he was writing. The major works of Jonathan Sperber and Gareth Stedman Jones are invaluable, at least in certain respects. Unfortunately, they also seem aimed at burying Marx's thinking and massive oeuvre along with Marx himself in Highgate Cemetery as a dated and defective product of nineteenth-century thought» (See Harvey 2018, xii–xiii; Harvey refers here to Sperber 2013 and Stedman Jones 2016). Harvey draws attention here to the fact that at least a part of the literature on Marx is not so much interested in his philosophical, economic, and political thought, but rather in Marx as a historical figure.

some hints of a return and revival of Marx and Marxism.<sup>34</sup> As historian Eric Hobsbawm observes, the economic crisis of 2008, the catastrophic consequences of the unlimited abuse of resources and commodity production for the environment, as well as the exponential and increasing disparity between rich and poor, have brought to light that the world's future «is put into question not by the threat of social revolution but by the very nature of [capitalism's] untrammled global operations, to which Karl Marx has proved so much more perceptive a guide than the believers of rational choices and self-correcting mechanisms of the free market.»<sup>35</sup>

The revival of Marx and Marxism can be observed in the most disparate contexts. Sales of Marx's *Das Kapital* have soared ever since 2008, as have those of *The Communist Manifesto* and the *Critique of Political Economy*.<sup>36</sup> Several well-known philosophers, human and social scientists – Chantal Mouffe, Naomi Klein, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Ranciere, Terry Eagleton, David Harvey, to name just a few – in recent years have drawn attention to the relevance and actuality of Marx's thought in highly successful books. In the documentary *MARX RELOADED* (Jason Barker, D/F 2011), which aims to examine the relevance of Marx's ideas in relation to the general economic decline observed in world markets during the late 2000s and early 2010s, many of these thinkers were interviewed. In 2017 the film *LE JEUNE KARL MARX* (Raul Peck, F/D/B), a biopic about Marx's life between 1843 and 1848, was screened at the Berlin Film festival (fig. 3). The writings, ideas and life of Karl Marx are not only the subjects of academic publications and professional film productions, but also of numerous more or less amateurish Internet contributions. See, for example, platforms like *Wikipedia* or *YouTube* – if someone types «Karl Marx» in *YouTube*, a total of 640,000 entries will appear – but also social networks like *Facebook*, influence public opinion about Karl Marx.<sup>37</sup>

The role of Marx in the contemporary «cultural imaginary» seems thus to be ambivalent.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, we observe a revival of Marxism, understood here as an interest in its philosophical, economic and political thought; on the other, we observe a commercial and «idolatrous» use of the Marx figure, by which his image has been largely detached from his thought, becoming almost a mere product of entertainment and consump-

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34 See Jeffries 2012.

35 Hobsbawm 2011, 398.

36 See Connolly 2008.

37 See Henschel 2013, 39–45.

38 Regarding the concept of «imaginary» see Castoradis 1975 and Pezzoli-Olgiatei 2015.

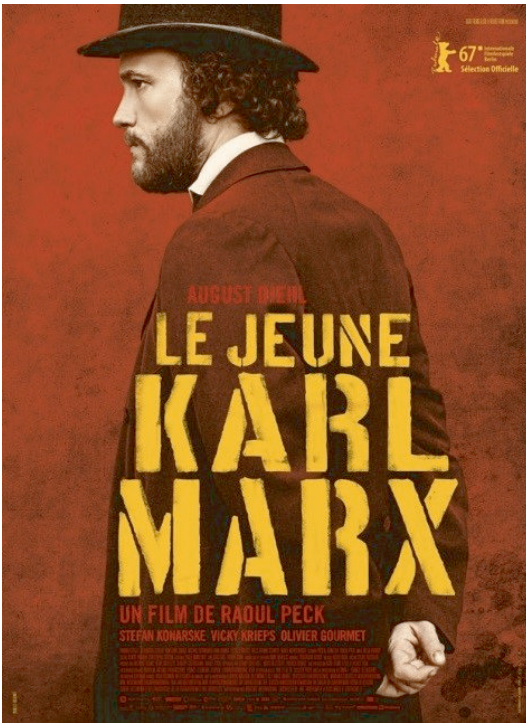


Fig. 3: Film poster of *Le jeune Karl Marx* (Raul Peck, F/D/B 2017, Image: Baldassare Scolari 2017).

tion. Like other super-icons, Marx's *imago* seems to be characterised by a sort of *hermeneutic and performative openness*, which allows a very disparate variety of usages and attributions of meaning. The Marx image can be used as an idol without any reference to Marx's philosophical, political and economic thought, thus in a decontextualised manner, or it can be used and received as an image that *connotes* Marx's worldview and *appeals to* the recipient to engage with his thought and writings. To understand if Marx's image is used and received in one way rather than another, nothing can be done but to study the concrete cases. And what is more appropriate and intriguing to take as a case study than an artefact that not only depicts Marx, but that is also located a few metres from his mortal remains?

### 3. *The Marx Memorial in Highgate Cemetery*

Following the death of his wife, in December 1881, Marx died in London on 14 March 1883 at the age of 64. Family and friends buried his body three days later in the non-consecrated section of Highgate Cemetery, near Kentish Town, where he lived his last years, and where his grandson and his wife were already resting. Several of his closest friends spoke at his funeral, including Friedrich Engels, who gave the funeral speech in English:

On the 14th of March, at a quarter to three in the afternoon, the greatest living thinker ceased to think. [...] Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history. [...] Such was the man of science. But this was not even half the man. [...] For Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation [...]. He died beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers – from the mines of Siberia to California, in all parts of Europe and America – and I make bold to say that, though he may have had many opponents, he had hardly one personal enemy. His name will endure through the ages, and so also will his work.<sup>39</sup>

With this funeral eulogy, Engels, together with Eleanor Marx, laid down the image of Marx, which he wanted to be remembered by friends, enemies, and more generally by people around the world. In other words, and with the same intention, he repeated what he had already written in the *Braunschweiger Volks-Kalender*, praising the two main «discoveries» of his friend and portraying him as both a «man of science» and a «revolutionist». «In this exaggeration» – writes Beatrix Bouvier – «Marx became the man who had basically set everything in motion. [...] It was not his disputed economic writings, nor the serious economic and social questions that followed from them, that were to be expressed, but rather the role that Marx played in confrontation between capital and labor.»<sup>40</sup> Marx advanced

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39 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/burial.htm> (accessed April 4, 2018)

40 Bouvier 2013, 18 (translation by the author).

to a mythological figure of class struggle, a narratively constructed paladin of all the workers and exploited.



*Fig. 4: The original burial place of Karl Marx with candles and stones left by visitors (Image: Baldassare Scolari 2017).*

Marx's tomb has repeatedly attracted both friends and enemies of Marx and his ideas. In fact, it soon became a place of pilgrimage for socialists and communists of every stripe. Even Lenin, in 1903, led a solemn delegation of Bolsheviks who were attending a conference in London to the burial place. By the end of the 1920's, the Soviets were even applying pressure to Her Majesty's Government to allow them permission to exhume Marx and remove him to Moscow where the plan was to lie him in state next to Lenin in Red Square. The pressure was resisted and the request refused. Marx and his family were reburied on the new site nearby in November 1954. The erection of a bust of Karl Marx, whose imposing stature forced the original burial place to be moved a few metres, results from an initiative of the Communist Party of Great Britain (fig. 4). The Marx Monument

Committee, founded for this purpose in 1955, gave the assignment to develop and produce the sculpture to the artist Laurence Bradshaw, a member of the party since the thirties. The party general secretary Harry Pollitt inaugurated the bust in the presence of two hundred people, on March 14, 1956.<sup>41</sup>

Since the memorial has been erected, there have been repeated acts of vandalism. In 1970 a person or persons unknown tried to blow up the monument. As stated in *The Londondead Blogspot*, «the sophisticated plan involved sawing off Karl's nose and then emptying bolts, fireworks and a mixture of weedkiller and sugar into the hollow head. The plot was foiled when many hours of sawing revealed that the nose was solid and therefore no easy route into the empty space inside the brain cavity.»<sup>42</sup> In June 1960 The memorial was also violated with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans such as «I love Eichmann.»<sup>43</sup> Recently, at the beginning of February 2019, the memorial was vandalised again. The suspected vandal damaged the marble plaque, which was taken from Marx's original 1883 gravestone and incorporated into the 1954 monument. As the *Guardian* reported, the plate appears to have been hit repeatedly with a hammer. Ian Dungavell, the chief executive of the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, condemned the attack as «an appalling thing to do» and a «particularly inarticulate form of political comment» and added: «that's the only consolation – he hasn't been forgotten about.»<sup>44</sup>

What characterises this monument so loved and hated? The bust is clearly a variation of the Marx icon: a massive sculpted head of Marx, with the usual lion's mane and beard, stands on a twelve-foot high granite plinth

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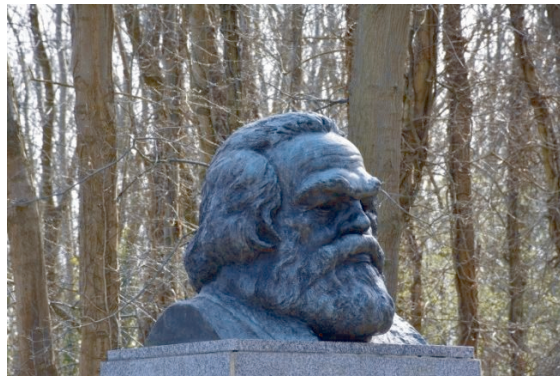
41 It is worth quoting here the description of the bust given in an article that appeared in *The Guardian* the day after the inauguration: «Although the colour is bilious and the inflated proportions are monstrous at close quarters, it is not without grandeur. The face has formidable benignity, the face of a father who would chastise his children but always in sorrow. If Communism ever becomes past history, the archaeologists of the future will be able to learn a great deal about the psychology of it by digging in the cemetery at Highgate» (*The Guardian* 1956). One cannot help but notice a strong critical attitude towards communism in general and Marx's bust in particular. This is not surprising, since in those years public opinion was becoming more and more aware of the atrocities committed by the Stalinist regime, which certainly did not constitute good publicity for the communist idea, especially for those who only knew of this idea through the Western anti-communist press.

42 Bingham 2014.

43 See Jewish Telegraphic Agency – Daily News Bulletin 1960.

44 Quoted in Weaver 2019.

with gold lettering (figs. 5 and 6). The memorial bears the carved message: «WORKERS OF ALL LANDS UNITE», the final line of *The Communist Manifesto*, and from the 11th *Thesis on Feuerbach*: «The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways – the point however is to *change* it». <sup>45</sup> As the pedestal and bust exceeded the height allowed in the cemetery, the bust was cut around the chest for the installation in 1956. It is perhaps for this reason that it looks a little stocky, giving Marx an almost comical look. From an aesthetic and artistic point of view, the bust of Marx in the Highgate Cemetery is nothing special. It has a monumental character that recalls the aesthetics of neighbouring tombs – including that of the philosopher Herbert Spencer. <sup>46</sup> Like the sculpture by Lev Kerbel, it depicts only the head of Marx – except for a hint of shoulders – and bears the most famous passage from the *Communist Manifesto* (which in Chemnitz is written in English, Russian and German on a wall at the back of the heavy 40 tonne giant head).



Figs. 5 and 6: *The Karl Marx Memorial in Highgate Cemetery*  
(Images: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).

However, leaving aside clear differences in style,<sup>47</sup> there are two major differences with respect to Kerbel's sculpture. In the first place, it is located in

45 Marx/Engels 1948, 44; Marx 1998, 571 (italics in original); the final line of *The Communist Manifesto* has been mostly translated as follows: «Workingman of all countries, unite!». For a critical reflection concerning the hierarchy of the names of the Marx family engraved on the white marble slab on the bottom of the Karl Marx memorial, see Dolores Zoé Bertschinger's contribution in this volume.

46 See Tartakowsky 2011, 78.

47 See Dühr 2013, 162 & 167.

England, which never was a Communist country, and thus was not commissioned by state apparatuses. It is therefore not an example of «authoritarian art setting in urban space»,<sup>48</sup> but the initiative of a minority party that never held power (in the UK parliamentary elections of 1955, one year before the erection of the bust, the party had won 0.1 % of the overall vote).<sup>49</sup> In the second place, Bradshaw's Marx bust is not situated in the centre of a square, namely a place of transit or in which political, commercial or recreational activities take place (manifestations, rallies, markets, concerts, etc.). Of course, both the inauguration of the bust at the Highgate Cemetery as well as Marxist's pilgrimages can be considered as political activities; moreover, recreational activities are also held at Highgate.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, as a cemetery, Highgate is a very special place because, as Carla Danani's essay in this volume highlights, as a «threshold» it both separates and connects the community of the living and of the dead.

Over the years, the eastern part of the Highgate Cemetery has become a sort of cosmopolitan necropolis for leftist activists, politicians and intellectuals – among others: South African communist and anti-apartheid activist Yusuf Dadoo (1909–1983), Communist leader and founder of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran Mansoor Hekmat (1951–2002), and historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012) – and more generally of leftist political activists coming from around the world (fig. 7). Many of them lived and died as expats in the United Kingdom, as, for example, the Trinidad-born Claudia Vera Jones (1915–1964), who, after emigrating to the USA, became a journalist and political activist (fig. 8). As a result of her political activities, she was deported in 1955 and subsequently resided in the United Kingdom, where she founded Britain's major black newspaper, *The West Indian Gazette*. On her tomb one can read the following epitaph: «Valiant fighter against racism and imperialism who dedicated her life to the progress of socialism and the liberation of her own black people». Also Kurdish Iraqi leftist poet Buland al-Haidari, who died in 1996, is buried near to Marx's grave and memorial; on his grave we read: «Iraqi poet of Kurdish origins. Pioneer of Arabic free verse. Advocate of democracy and human rights. Lived in exile for 30 years» (fig. 9). This and other examples show that the area around the Marx memorial has become a highly symbolic space for people who understood themselves as being part of a transnational, cos-

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48 Mikuda-Hüttel 2013b, 172.

49 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1955\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1955_United_Kingdom_general_election) (accessed April 4, 2018).

50 See Marie-Therese Mäder's contribution in this volume.



mopolitan community of activists and intellectuals committed, in different forms and variations, to the same universal fight against injustice and exploitation of workers and marginalised people.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 7: Tomb of historian Eric Hobsbawm (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).

Fig. 8: Tomb of political activist Claudia Vera Jones (Image: Baldassare Scolari 2018).

Fig. 9: Tomb of Kurdish Iraqi poet Buland al-Haidari (Image: Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018).

In a comparative study about the political usage of Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago, Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, and Highgate Cemetery in Lon-

51 Other Epitaphs of tombs near to the Marx Memorial are: Richard and Kay Titmuss (1973 and 1987): «Socialist and humanitarian thinker. Committed wife and welfare worker»; David Cohen (1988): «Our dear comrade»; Sello Moeti (1988): «Son of Africa. Our beloved comrade and friend»; Farzad Bazoft (1990): «Observer journalist. A journalist in Iraq. Executed by the regime»; Carmen England (1991): «She caused her people to realise their beauty»; Frank Ridley (1994): «Freethinker and campaigner»; Simon Paul Wolff (1995): «Scientist and campaigner. I shall never believe that God plays dice with the world»; Jamil Munir Abdul-Hamid (1997): «Iraqi communist dedicated to democracy and human rights in Iraq»; Dachine Rainer (2000): «Poet and anarchist»; Paul Foot (2004): «Writer and revolutionary. Rise like Lions after slumber / In unvanquishable number / Shake your chain to earth like dew / Which in sleep had fallen on you / You are many - They are few» [This epitaph reproduces the last strophe of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *The Mask of Anarchy*]; Wolfgang and Joza Bruegel (1985 and 2005): «They strove for a better world»; Dr. Sabiha Mehdi Al-Khalil (2005): «Tireless campaigner for peace, women's rights and social justice in Iraq»; Ian Dorans (2007): «Loving family man and socialist to the end.» See Tartakowsky 2011, 74, 88.

don, Danielle Tartakowsky argues that all three cemeteries are «complex necropolises in which intimate relations have been forged between death, sacrality, history and politics». The three cemeteries share an important political function in common, namely they «have imposed themselves early and lastingly as symbols of the workers' movement, in the diversity of its components and on the international scale.»<sup>52</sup> These places, she argues, «confer on death a particular sacredness», inasmuch as they are all expression of the desire «to participate in a common ascent towards a better becoming and to construct, in this way, a new form of eternity, where history [becomes] the source of a new transcendence.»<sup>53</sup>

Tartakowsky seems here to corroborate a thesis supported by many scholars, according to which Marxism should be understood as a «substitute religion» or as a «quasi-religion».<sup>54</sup> Roland Stromberg, for example, lists a number of similarities between Marxism and the Abrahamic religions:

In place of Yahweh stands historical Necessity; the Proletariat is, of course, the Chosen People; the Christian *parousia* becomes the post-revolutionary Communist society. The final fight between Christ and Anti-Christ seems as obvious an analogue to the last antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat as does the Saints' Everlasting Rest to the Marxist Kingdom of Freedom when Communism has resolved all alienations and dualisms and restored man to his nature. The specific structure of Judeo-Christian eschatology was thus found in Marxism. Additionally, the Marxist movement took on cult qualities quite predictable by the sociology of religion: making the works of Marx

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52 Tartakowsky 2011, 74–75 (translation by the author). At Père-Lachaise, several hundred anonymous communards, who were executed by the Versailles army at the end of the «bloody Week» in May 1871, were buried in mass graves Northeast of its surrounding wall. In the Waldheim Cemetery of Chicago there are the burial places of five anarchist militants, who were arrested after the deadly explosion of a bomb at a workers' meeting held on May 4, 1886 in Haymarket Square. They were condemned to hang at the end of a show trial and executed the following year and their innocence was only recognised six years later. According to Tartakowsky, in both cemeteries the mentioned fallen communards and anarchists, who were promoted as holy martyrs, encouraged the affirmation of heterodox modes of expression of transcendence and of the sacred.

53 Tartakowsky 2011, 90 (translation by the author).

54 Stromberg 1979; Smith 1994; See also Boli 1981; Joshi 1991; Ling 1980; Turner 1983.

and Engels into holy writ, establishment of an official priesthood, a «secular scholasticism», even holy relics and pilgrimages.<sup>55</sup>

Should we agree with this description of Marxism and understand the Memorial in Highgate Cemetery as a memorial sign that *signifies* Marx's burial place as a holy place and its visitation as a sort of religious or quasi-religious pilgrimage and celebration?

Answering this question is anything but simple, since it depends, in the first place, on how the term «religion» is defined. Martin Riesebrodt, for example, lists eight different definitions that compete with each other;<sup>56</sup> depending on which of these (or other) definitions one decides to use, arguments may be found for or against the argument that Marxism is a religion or not. The problem of the definition of religion is made even more complicated by the fact that the term «religion» itself is an important element within practices and strategies of power legitimisation. As William T. Cavanaugh rightly observes, «the term religion has been used in different times and places by different people according to different interests. [...] [T]he construction of the category of religion has become an important piece in the ideology of the West since the rise of modernity, both within Western cultures and in the colonization of non-Western cultures. Religion is [...] a term that constructs and is constructed by different kinds of political configurations.»<sup>57</sup> What Cavanaugh notes is also valid for the thesis that Marxism is a religion, a substitute religion or a quasi-religion, a thesis that has often been used to generally criticise Marxism as an irrational, absolutist and divisive ideology.

In my view, however, the most interesting question is not so much whether the figure of Marx or, more precisely, the practices by which this figure is memorialised, should be considered religious or quasi-religious. The challenging question is rather what this figure performs, in what way it affects the recipients. In the previous pages I shed light on very different uses and practices of memorialisation of the Marx *imago*, each of which has

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55 Stromberg 1979, 210.

56 Religion as divine gift of reason (Immanuel Kant); as revelation experience (Rudolf Otto, Gerard van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade); as a projection (Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud); as proto-science (Auguste Comte, Edward B. Taylor, James Frazer); as affect and affect control (David Hume, William McDougall, Robert R. Marett, Bronislaw Malinowski); as brain function (Andrew Newberg and other neurologists); as sacralised society (Émile Durkheim); as salvation interest (Max Weber); as commodity (rational choice theory). See Riesebrodt 2007.

57 Cavanaugh 2009, 58.

a different performative force, affecting the recipients in different ways. In East Germany and in the Soviet Union it played an important role in practices aiming at legitimising political authority; it was used as a symbol for the national political body with which a citizen could (and should) identify him- or herself. If in the countries of the Western Bloc the figure of Marx was initially demonised, when it became clear that Marxism was in decline, the advertising industry took the first steps towards a use of it that I called idolatrous, inasmuch as the figure has been stripped of its historicity and from any reference to Marx's political thought. Nevertheless, as we have seen, in the last few decades Marx has returned to being a reference figure for many people and within different media, in which there is an explicit reference to and reflection on his thought, his critique of capitalism and his vision of a more just, fair and supportive society. We have therefore identified at least three very different uses of the Marx figure: first, it has been used within practices of political legitimisation aimed at constructing a collective national identity; secondly, it has been implemented by the advertising industry for marketing purposes; finally, it has been referred to in practices of memorialisation aiming at keeping alive his political thought and commitment for a better world and society.

#### 4. Mike Leigh's *Film High Hopes*

Released shortly before the end of the cold war, Mike Leigh's film *High Hopes* (UK, 1988) portrays the working class' disillusionment, the degradation of the social state and the annihilation of the dream of class-free and socialist society. The two main characters are Cyril, a postal courier, and Shirley, a municipal gardener who wants to have a baby, despite her partner's strong views that the world is already «over-populated». Cyril is an old-style Marxist who seems to have definitively lost all hope in the possibility of a radical change in society and in the realisation of the socialist project and looks to present and future times with bitterness and disillusionment. This attitude does not only affect his opposition to Shirley's desire to have children, but also his skepticism concerning political activism. In a scene in which a young «active» Marxist tells Shirley and Cyril about the regular meetings with other comrades in which she participates, the latter asks sardonically: «But apart from the yabber, what do you actually do?». When the young woman, angrily, asks «well, what do you do?», Cyril replies: «Sit on my arse.»

Cyril's relationship with Marxism and in particular with the figure of Marx is shown in an exemplary way in a scene, in which Cyril and Shirley

visit the Marx memorial in Highgate Cemetery. While Shirley carefully observes the surrounding vegetation and seems to enjoy the fresh air, Cyril, with a serious, almost gloomy face walks straight ahead of her, almost in a hurry to reach the goal of their trip. After framing the monument erected above the tomb, the camera shows the couple from behind, while their gaze is turned to the memorial:

S: He's a bit big, isn't he?

C: He was a giant.

S: No, I mean his head.

C: He's all right. What he done was he wrote down the truth. People was being exploited. Industrial revolution – they were forced off the land into the factories. There weren't no working class before then. He set down a programme for change.

S: He's got his whole family in there with him.

C: Without Marx, there'd have been nothing.

S: Oh look. His grandson was only four when he died.

C: Kids died young in these days.

S: I know.

C: Wouldn't have been no unions, no welfare state, no nationalised industries.

S: I wish I'd brought some flowers now.

C: Don't matter, does it, flowers?

S: What you mean, it doesn't matter?

C: He's dead.

S: You're going on about him.

C: I'm talking about his ideas.

S: I know. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it. There you are.

That said, Shirley moves away from the memorial and approaches the grave of the chairman of the South African Communist Party, where she enjoys the sight of flowers. Cyril remains silent for a while, as if Shirley's observation had shot him down (fig. 10). After a while he seems to regain his strength and observes:

C: The thing is, change what? It's a different world now, Innit?

S: That ivy could do with a bit of a prune.

C: By the year 2000, there'll be 36 TV stations, 24 hours a day, telling you what to think.

*Asian tourists are entering in the frame.*

S: They've planted them trees right on the top of the graves.

C: Pissing in the wind, Innit.

*Asian tourists are looking at the memorial from behind C. and S. (fig. 11).*

C: You ain't interested, are you?

S: Yes, I am. I care a lot.



*Fig. 10: Cyril looking at the Karl Marx Memorial  
(Film still: High Hopes, 01:01:46).*



*Fig. 11: Tourists looking at the Karl Marx Memorial  
(Film still: High Hopes, 01:02:30).*

This scene, like the whole film, highlights in an almost caricatured way two completely different ways of approaching the world and life. On the one hand there is Cyril, who looks bitterly into the world and, despite holding to his moral and political convictions, has given up all hope. He

speaks of Marx in mythological terms: a giant, without which there would be nothing. Nevertheless, he has almost lost confidence in the ability to realise Marx's ideas, the same ideas that fascinate him. Cyril seems to no longer believe that it is possible to change the world; he imagines and describes the society of the immediate future in terms, for us who live in the so-called New Media age, that appear fairly correct and realistic, describing it as the society of spectacle, in which the media dominate the minds, desires and thoughts of humanity. It is a society in which everything is considered and used as a mere object of consumption and in which, as the film seems to suggest in the last shots of the scene, even the tomb and the bust of Karl Marx are reduced to tourist destinations. For Cyril, in this society, there is no more room for the class struggle.

On the other hand, there is Shirley, who observes and enjoys the beauty of the natural world in a kind of naïve, childlike but yet authentically jubilant way. It seems clear, looking at the whole movie, that it is Shirley who has the healthiest relationship with the world; she is still able to look forward, to imagine a future in which there is still happiness and it makes sense to have children, while Cyril is only able to «sit on his arse». Also their ways of looking at and approaching the monument of Karl Marx could not be more different: Cyril focuses only on the «giant» Marx, the mythic and iconic figure of the class struggle, while Shirley sees Marx as father of a family and notices the flowers someone has placed at his grave (figs. 12 and 13). Shirley has a more pristine look than her partner, because she can see Marx as a person and as a family man and not as the mythological figure that he has become in a certain type of collective imaginary. However, if it is true, on the one hand, that the film makes fun of the character of Cyril (and with him of all those for whom he is the symbolic representative), it is equally true, that it critically displays the social unease and the ugliness and selfishness produced by late capitalism in the era of Thatcherian neo-liberalism. The film reaffirms thus the rightness of Marxist analysis and critique of capitalist society, but at the same time expresses the total failure of the Marxist revolutionary project, implicitly addressing the situation of impasse which, since the eighties, those movements and political parties that still refer to Marx's thought and ideas have reached.

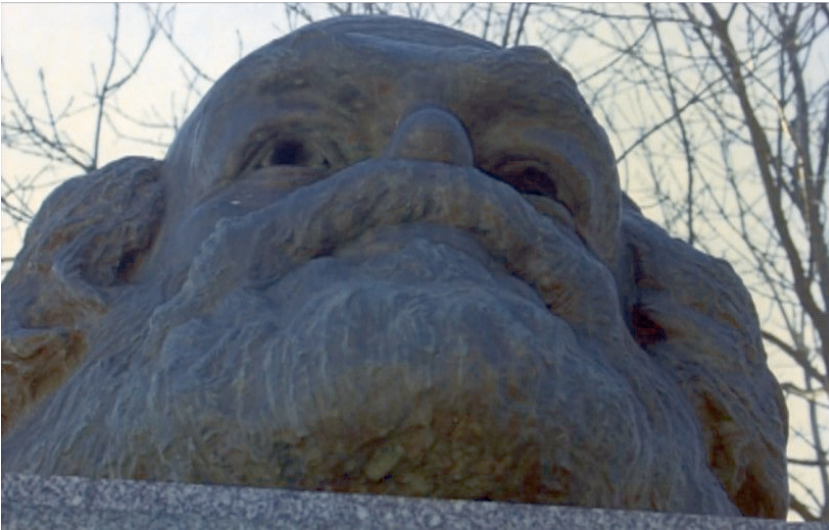


Fig. 12: The «massive head» of Karl Marx (Film still: *High Hopes*, 01:01:47).



Fig. 13: Flowers at the bottom of the Karl Marx Memorial (Film still: *High Hopes*, 01:01:33).

In a sense, also Mike Leigh's film highlights a sort of quasi-religious veneration of the Marx icon by the protagonist Cyril. However, *High Hopes*



somehow addresses also the risk that the Marx icon could become a mere idol: an image that demands faith, but which is no longer able to convince and which, as a result, is self-referential and can only be consumed as a sort of «visual commodity». Cyril's attitude exemplifies one of the conditions of Marxism in so called postmodern times: Marxism has become a narrative in which it is still possible to believe but is no longer able to convince or, more precisely, to motivate people to political action. Marxism nowadays seems to be, so to speak, a weakened, inoperative myth. Nevertheless, it is not dead. As demonstrated by the tombs in the area of Marx's burial place, Marx's image is still able to appeal to people who identify themselves not with a certain nationality, or ethnicity, but with a universal idea of justice. Perhaps the myth is, at the moment, almost inoperative, but the necropolis that has formed around the tomb of Karl Marx is there to remind us that there were and still are persons for whom Marx is not only a reference figure, an icon for political identification, but who are also inspired by Marx's thought to fight for a better world.

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# Sport as Bodily Practice of Remembrance

## Remembering Heroes, Remembering Nations

Alexander Darius Ornella



His remains were consigned to their parent earth, on Wednesday, November 15th, at the Highgate Cemetery, attended by an immense concourse of the sympathizing and curious. A committee of friends, the admirers of true British courage, have resolved to raise a monument over the spot where — After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 1: Tom Sayers' tomb at Highgate Cemetery  
(Image: Wikimedia Commons).<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Introduction

«SOME four or five weeks ago, a strange procession made its way through the north-western suburbs of London, from Camden Town to Highgate Cemetery»<sup>3</sup> reports *The Spectator* in its 10 February 1866 edition. The obituary – or more a form of reckoning – is dedicated to Tom Sayers (1826–1865), considered the last English bare-knuckle prize fighter. Mocking the attending crowd, *The Spectator* drew a sharp comparison between the «immense crowd» composed of the «dregs of the population of London» and

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1 Sayers/Miles 1866, 188.

2 Image source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SayersTomb\\_Highgate-Cemetery.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SayersTomb_Highgate-Cemetery.JPG), image credits: John Armagh, copyright: public domain, (accessed June 3, 2019).

3 *The Spectator* 1866.

Lion, Sayers' dog, «as chief mourner, a gigantic dog, of the St. Bernard breed, sitting in lonely grandeur on the top of a little pony cart.» Continuing the skeptical tone, *The Spectator* reports:

Perhaps a more grotesque funeral was never seen in the streets of London; yet was it not altogether out of keeping with the no less grotesque career of the dead hero of the procession. It was something akin to a feeling of true devotion and duty which drove this London mob to crowd around the bier, to show its last respects to Tom Sayers, «Champion of England.»<sup>4</sup>

Tom Sayers' tomb (fig. 1) is both monumental and fairly simple with Lion probably attracting the most attention of visitors.

The funeral and the gravesite prompt the question about remembered and forgotten athletes. *The Spectator's* damning obituary places the question of remembering and forgetting into the context of sensationalism of both the crowd and media coverage. Its reference to the crowd's hero, the «Champion of England» plunges the question into the middle of identity politics and discourses about nationhood.

Taking the discourses around remembering Tom Sayers as the starting point, this article will explore the relationship between sport, nationhood, and memory. It argues that memorial practices in sport that remember national heroes are political practices that on the one hand strengthen a sense of togetherness, and on the other hand walk the fine line on the verge of nationalistic discourses. This article is written from the perspective of someone who grew up in Austria. With Austria's history and complicity in the Third Reich, discourses around the nation («Nation»), a people («Volk»), national identity («nationale Identität»), or nationhood were problematic and were often used to resonate with far right-wing and extremist political and ideological ideas. To some extent, that is still true today when right-wing parties continue to hijack discourses around national identity and use it as tool for othering (the «Daham statt Islam» / «at home instead of Islam»<sup>5</sup> is a prime example of these processes).<sup>6</sup> As such, the author comes from a background where discourses about nationhood are politically laden and brings his background into his analysis to problematize heroic myths of identity and nationhood.

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4 The Spectator 1866.

5 Die Presse 2015.

6 Bushell 2013, 193–214.

## 2. *Tom Sayers: The Hero and The Memorial*

Tom Sayers' life and pugilistic career played out in the 19th century which saw a big interest in bareknuckle fighting at the start of the century and witnessed a decline in support and interest towards the middle of the century. While bareknuckle was illegal, it was widely accepted and perceived to perform a vital social function.<sup>7</sup> The illegal status of pugilism was not necessarily linked to concerns over the fighters' health because at that time, it was seen as a fairly civilized encounter and as a site to settle conflicts and disputes.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the questions of pugilism's illegality and social acceptance were linked to issues of social control.<sup>9</sup> Initially, in the early 18th century, commentators interpreted pugilism as bestowing a sense of masculinity onto the fighters at a time when masculinity was perceived to be endangered by a spread of effeminacy as well as an essential element of class identification.<sup>10</sup> In other words, because it was seen as a means for the «instantiation of hegemonic cultural values»<sup>11</sup> and a stronghold against perceived threats to society, pugilism was a vital and accepted part of public space despite its illegality.<sup>12</sup> From the mid/late 18th century onwards, however, authorities increasingly perceived bareknuckle fighting and prize fighting as a threat to public order.<sup>13</sup>

Tom Sayers' boxing career, its peak, and his death happened during the time when pugilism and its social status went through stark transformations. Born in 1826, Tom Sayers' death in 1865 marked the end of the bareknuckle prize fighting era.

As much as boxing itself was a «site of a complex encounter between different social groups»,<sup>14</sup> so was Tom Sayers' funeral. Classed as the «largest working-class funeral» in 19th century London by Chris Brooks,<sup>15</sup> the funeral, the funeral procession, and Highgate Cemetery were sites of complex class encounters. Staged with elements from ceremonial funerals, in particular Arthur Wellesley's, 1st Duke of Wellington, whose funeral took place in 1852, Brooks argues that Sayers' funeral «seems a conscious

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7 Downing 2010, 348.

8 See Holt 1998, 16; Radford 2005, 257.

9 See Anderson 2001, 35.

10 See Juengel 2003, 91–93.

11 Juengel 2003, 92.

12 See Downing 2010, 348.

13 See Sheard 1997, 43.

14 Griffin 2005, 15. See Gorn 2010, 29–30; Stewart 2011, 477–481.

15 Brooks 1989, 5.

imitation-cum-parody of the carriage funerals of the gentry and upper bourgeoisie.»<sup>16</sup> Newspapers disagreed on the status of the deceased, too. Some newspapers covering the funeral, «emphasized the funeral's national sporting significance, locating Sayers as a national hero.»<sup>17</sup> Other newspapers were more critical of the hero status and funeral attendees. *St Pancras Reporter* and *Illustrated Sporting News* called the funeral a riot.<sup>18</sup> *The Spectator*, as noted earlier, was concerned about mob behavior threatening the sacredness of Highgate Cemetery and attributed to Lion, Sayers' dog who accompanied the coffin, the status of the true mourner and the only appropriate behaviour.<sup>19</sup>

The perception of the funeral as well as Highgate Cemetery as a burial place are key in understanding not only complex class encounters but also issues of memorializing athletes and the question why and in what context and in what spaces athletes are memorialized, immortalized, and remembered. That newspapers were concerned over the intrusion of Highgate Cemetery was not just because of the sacredness of the place. More importantly, sacredness here needs to be understood in terms of «appropriate space» people from different backgrounds are allowed to inhabit. To what extent the decision to choose Highgate as Sayers' burial place was deliberately intended to subvert class discourses remains unclear. «It seems feasible, however, that choosing Highgate as the goal of the great procession was a part of the funeral's whole challenge to middle-class values. There was, after all, a ready alternative [...] the most obvious place for Sayers to be buried was the St Pancras Cemetery at Finchley»<sup>20</sup>. Or maybe, it was «a badge of social arrival»<sup>21</sup>?

Tom Sayers certainly had «arrived» – at least in the minds of his supporters and fans. According to his biographer, Henry D. Miles, Sayers (fig. 2) had earned his place in the Elysian fields as «one to whom the shades of Ajax, Entelles, Milo, Dares, [...] and the deified twins, Castor and Pollux, may well give the fist of friendship for a turn-up on those yellow fields of asphodel,» where poets have feigned departed heroes carry out their sports.»<sup>22</sup>

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16 Brooks 1989, 14.

17 Huggins 2011, 413.

18 Brooks 1989, 16.

19 *The Spectator* 1866.

20 Brooks 1989, 17.

21 Brooks 1989, 18.

22 Sayers/Miles 1866, 3.



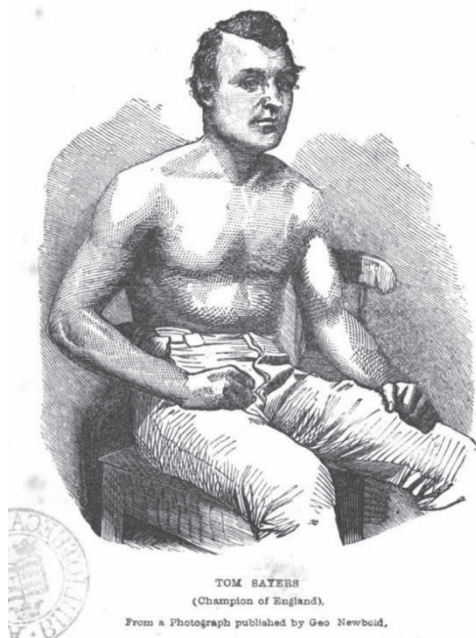


Fig. 2: *Tom Sayers, Champion of England.*<sup>23</sup>

### 3. *Creating Heroes*

The image of and reference to «giving the fist of friendship» the «yellow field of asphodel», or the Elysian fields, carries Tom Sayers away into a mythological realm and elevates his heroism on a par with Greek heroes. The biographer draws on ancient Greece to link athletic with moral achievement: physical strength as an expression of virtues such as «scorn of ease»,<sup>24</sup> patriotism, physical and mental endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness. The author also refers to a passage in Plato that links boxing with «military art»<sup>25</sup>. The connection between physical and mental endurance was not uncommon in ancient Greece. Boxing was a way to

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23 Sayers/Miles 1866, vi.

24 Sayers/Miles 1866, 2.

25 Sayers/Miles 1866, 2.

demonstrate and embody Greek ideals of discipline and beauty and Greek writers such as Pindar saw in winning a fight the «culmination of virtuous living worthy of Zeus' blessing.»<sup>26</sup>

The Romans might have introduced pugilism to England, but with the beginning of the Christian Era it would have disappeared again, Gorn argues. He suggests that the rediscovery of pugilism in England was part of a broader and renewed appreciation of classical texts during the English Restoration in the 17th century.<sup>27</sup> Sayers' funeral, his tombstone memorial, and his biography as written memorial certainly seem to suggest that fans deemed sporting figures and their achievements worthy of mythological recognition. Sayers' biographer concludes the written memorial with the observation that a «committee of friends, the admirers of true British courage, have resolved to raise a monument over the spot where — After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.»<sup>28</sup>

The ending of Sayers' biography attributes special significance to that very moment when the living meet the dead, when the living meet the decaying body, when the living materialize their act of remembrance in the form of a monument. I argue that this space where the living materialize remembrance and meet materialized remembrance becomes crucial for understanding the social and political significance of remembrance - as I will explore further in this chapter.

Sport seem to be a particular arena to invite ritual and myth making practices. Sport – as a system – with its competitions, its financial webs, fan engagement, and ceremonies offers a space for rituals to be acted out. «The embodied athlete», Varda Burstyn argues, «has become, on a social scale, the living mythic symbol-bearer, and the idea of the athlete-hero is fundamental to the nature and success of sport.»<sup>29</sup> Ritual practice in sport «generates and sustains a *mythology* – a set of story-beliefs about society and the cosmos – that is ideologically laden. The rituals and mythologies of sport are the account sport gives of the world, and the base on which its vast contemporary economies rise.»<sup>30</sup> The crowd at Tom Sayers' funeral, his biography, and the media accounts oscillating between appreciation and sensing a threat to the ordained social order can give us an idea of the account that Sayers' decaying pugilist body carried into Highgate in proces-

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26 Gorn 2010, 22.

27 See Gorn 2010, 23.

28 Sayers/Miles 1866, 188.

29 Burstyn 1999, 20.

30 Burstyn 1999, 20.

sion was giving of the world. Sayers' biographer calls the sponsors of his memorial a «committee of friends, the admirers of true British courage»<sup>31</sup>.

In the early and mid-19th century, the middle and upper classes increasingly fostered a perception that prize fighting does not boost public morality but fosters gambling and uncontrolled and savage behaviour.<sup>32</sup> Bareknuckle boxing vanished after Tom Sayers' death, but boxing, with its rules and regulations, became incorporated into acceptable (because policed) behaviour. The admiration of «true British courage» seemed to reflect and resonate with something that laid the groundwork for the increasing connection between sports, military, courage, and discipline. The identifier «British» seems to suggest that there is something distinctive and unique about «British» courage that sets it apart from other forms of courage. Holt argues that from the late 19th century onwards, sports, military, and national identity have become increasingly intertwined: «With an impregnable sense of their own virtue, the British saw themselves as «good sports» who, unlike most foreigners, «played the game». Sporting metaphors increasingly permeated the wider language of national character as military service became the exception rather than the rule.»<sup>33</sup>

While Holt seems to downplay the importance of the military, Burstyn actually identifies an expansion of military preparedness across Europe in the 19th century leading up to the ability to quickly mobilize the male population for a total war.<sup>34</sup> Sport seems to have played a key role in this militarization of Europe. The late 19th century saw an increasing athleticization of English society as means to channel violence and aggression and to produce docile bodies.<sup>35</sup> It is not difficult to see links between this push towards the athleticization of (male) society and the press coverage of the «mob» that attended Tom Sayer's funeral. The mob that does not know its proper place or proper behaviour needs to be absorbed into socially acceptable, useful, and productive forms of exercising the body. In other words: bareknuckle fighting and the masculinities it produced, once seen as on a par with ancient Greek heroic deeds, had lost its bio-political purpose. Or to follow Foucault, a «calculated management of life»<sup>36</sup> that aims to optimize and adjust the population to economic processes and requirements. In this context of the increasing athleticization of society, the mili-

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31 Sayers/Miles 1866, 188.

32 See Juengel 2003, 99.

33 See Holt 1998, 12.

34 See Burstyn 1999, 67.

35 See Burstyn 1999, 49, 70, 76.

36 Foucault 1978, 140.

tary, too, became increasingly athleticized in the UK and beyond, in particular in the United States.<sup>37</sup>

Ideas about sport as disciplining the moral agent and the spilling over of sports ideals into non-sportive contexts contributed to the development of the idea of the (white male) hero embodying manhood and aggressive masculinity<sup>38</sup> – that, however, always remains channeled and controlled. Boxing was part of a mix of sports contributing to ideas of military preparedness and legitimizing western militarism.<sup>39</sup> In fact, boxing history shares parallels with military history, as Woodward and Dawson argue, in particular with reference to warrior legends, nationalist discourses, and ideas of patriotic duties.<sup>40</sup> It can be argued that narratives about boxing heroes and soldier heroes benefitted from each other, in particular in the middle of the 19th century.

There was no letting up, as there had been from time to time during the conflict with Napoleon, in police efforts to prevent fights but the attitude towards combat sports had to be somewhat modified, and anxieties over the fitness of the population for military service, aroused by the war, continued through the late 1850s and 1860s, to the general benefit of all physical sports.<sup>41</sup>

The idea that pugilism might help promote ideas of manliness, masculinity, «the national spirit and its promotion of military potential» was not limited to Europe but could also be observed in other parts of the world, such as the US and Australia.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the 20th century, sport contributed to «normalising, legitimising, endorsing and venerating militarism in general and western state militarism in particular.»<sup>43</sup> It did so in a variety of ways, through promoting the idea of military preparedness, paying tribute to the armed forces, or sending sports soldiers to sporting events, such as the Olympic Games.<sup>44</sup>

The increasingly intimate relationship between sport and the military also rekindled popular fascination with the soldier hero, «one of the most

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37 See Burstyn 1999, 68, 71, 76.

38 See Burstyn 1999, 68.

39 See Kelly 2017a, 277–278.

40 See Woodward 2007, 29; Dawson 1994, 11.

41 Brailsford 1988, 135.

42 Brailsford 1988, 143.

43 Kelly 2017a, 277.

44 See Bundeswehr 2018; Fischer 2017, 64–78; Kelly 2017a.

durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity»<sup>45</sup> in particular in the west since antiquity. The body of the soldier hero has served as canvas to portray and embody adventures, courage, and virtues.<sup>46</sup>

«Heroic narratives», Graham Dawson argues, «have been given a particular inflection in discourses of the nation generated since the emergence of the nation-state in early-modern Europe. [...] Their stories became myths of nationhood itself [...] If masculinity has had a role in imagining the nation, then so too has the nation played its part in constituting preferred forms of masculinity.»<sup>47</sup> In particular after 9/11, in the War on Terror climate, the soldier hero has gained renewed significance to harness public support for the troops. John Kelly discusses in detail how armed forces become heroes and how this «hero-fication» allows for a paradoxical separation between soldier-heroes and the war, as common slogans such as «support the troops, not the war» demonstrate.<sup>48</sup>

And it is in particular the soldier hero that becomes the object of veneration, myth building, and remembrance, the object and subject of nationalist discourses, in the context of CrossFit.

#### *4. Remembering Heroes – Practicing Nationhood*

In the context of prizefighting in the United States, Elliot Gorn argues that «sports such as prize fighting embodied deep-rooted national mythology.»<sup>49</sup> But how these national mythologies were embodied, who they attracted, and who was woven into hero myths changed over time: «What changed by the late nineteenth century, however, was the fact that boxers were no longer heroes exclusively to working-class and ethnic peoples. Now America's growing white-collar population craved muscular demigods. Athletic idols were harbingers of transformation as the success ethic stretched to accommodate new social necessities.»<sup>50</sup>

The strong muscular bodies, however, are not the only aspect of sporting heroes that attract attention. Rather, their bodies, how these bodies look and what they do, are intertwined with values, ideas, and narratives. As Richard Holt argues, «Sporting heroes are both universal and particu-

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45 Dawson 1994, 1.

46 See Dawson 1994, 1.

47 Dawson, 1994, 1.

48 See Kelly 2017b, 149–162.

49 Gorn 2010, 249.

50 Gorn 2010, 250.

lar. They resemble each other and differ from each other. They have common qualities like courage and will-power but they also have specific national and social characteristics. [...] Heroes are not just gifted individuals we admire; their lives are woven into stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.»<sup>51</sup> What happens, however, when that «telling» of stories about soldier heroes and about ourselves becomes embodied practice itself? In other words, what happens if the hero is remembered not just by craving the hero and (usually) his demigod body, but when both remembrance and the myth are acted out through bodily sportive practice rather than through an extensive written or oral narrative?

CrossFit is a highly popular high intensity fitness regime founded by Greg Glassman in 2000. It is typically performed in small groups, that combines elements from gymnastics, Olympic weightlifting, bodyweight exercises, and athletics and has enjoyed an increasing popularity over the last decade. While CrossFit defines itself as «constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity»,<sup>52</sup> it features a set of standard workouts. All of these standard workouts are named, for example, the Benchmark Girls, such as Fran or Nancy, or the New Girls, such as Eva or Hope. Another set of workouts – crucial for the purposes of this paper – are called the «Hero Workouts» named after fallen service members (mostly men).<sup>53</sup>

### 5. Remembering through Body Practice

JT, Michael, Murph, or Daniel are not simply (or just) the names of US-American soldiers who fell in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, but they also form part of the pantheon of the Hero Workouts, a collection of CrossFit workouts named after fallen (and mostly male) service members. In this pantheon, Murph is one of the best-known CrossFit Hero Workouts. It consists of a one mile run, followed by 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups, 300 squats, and another one mile run, all performed in body armor or a 20-lb vest. These hero workouts, such as Murph, do not just come with a set of instructions of what the workout consists of, but the CrossFit website also features an image and a mini-biography of the fallen service member. Murph, for example, is named:

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51 Holt 1998, 12.

52 CrossFit HQ 2016.

53 See CrossFit HQ 2018.

In memory of Navy Lt. Michael Murphy, 29, of Patchogue, New York, who was killed in Afghanistan on June 28, 2005.

This workout was one of Mike's favorites and he'd named it Body Armor. From here on it will be referred to as Murph in honor of the focused warrior and great American who wanted nothing more in life than to serve this great country and the beautiful people who make it what it is.<sup>54</sup>

Murph was first posted on the CrossFit website as a workout on 18 August 2005,<sup>55</sup> with the first Hero Workout being JT posted on 5 July 2005.<sup>56</sup> Looking at past iterations of the CrossFit.com website on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, it seems that it was not until roughly June 2006 that the canon of CrossFit Hero Workouts appeared under «The Heroes Workouts» in the FAQ section. Containing only four Hero Workouts in 2006, JT (being the first Hero Workout posted 6 July 2005), Michael, Murph, and Daniel, the number of Hero Workouts has since grown from the original four CrossFit «saints» to almost 200 with one of the latest additions being the workout Oits added 24 April 2018.<sup>57</sup>

The workout Murph also holds a special place in what could be called CrossFit's «liturgical year». It is typically performed on Memorial Day Weekend and has become highly popular not only in the US but in CrossFit boxes around the world. CrossFitters around the world can participate in the Murph Challenge,<sup>58</sup> a fundraising event for the LT. Michael P. Murphy Memorial Scholarship Foundation (independently from the company CrossFit organized).<sup>59</sup> Military.com, a military and veteran membership organization consisting of roughly 10 million members, also advertises the event.<sup>60</sup>

While CrossFit and the US Military are independent organizations, links between the two can be seen as interwoven on different levels. The CrossFit Journal, for example, features dedicated coverage on servicemen and servicewomen doing CrossFit at home and abroad.<sup>61</sup> More importantly, however, the Journal itself pushes the idea of remembering service heroes through workouts: «These men were fathers, husbands and sons.

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54 CrossFit HQ 2018.

55 See CrossFit 2005a.

56 See CrossFit 2005b.

57 See CrossFit HQ 2018.

58 See Forged 2018.

59 Murph Foundation 2018.

60 See Smith 2018.

61 See CrossFit Journal 2019.

They were brothers to their fellow SEALs. They were also CrossFitters. In their actions, these men embodied the values and spirit of true heroes, and to immortalize their courage, bravery and self-sacrifice, the CrossFit Hero workouts were created.»<sup>62</sup>

For some CrossFitters, Hero Workouts are not just challenging workouts or opportunities for social gatherings. Rather, they are embedded in and enact practices of remembrance. In an article explaining the rationale of the workout, Daniel O'Brien explains that «Hero WOD's are made by CrossFit to honor the men and women that have fallen in the line of duty.»<sup>63</sup> By doing workouts such as Murph, CrossFitters not only suffer through gruelling workouts, but they «pay special tribute to Lieutenant Murphy by joining together and suffering through this workout.»<sup>64</sup> These Hero Workouts are about paying tribute where tribute is due because service members like Lt Murphy have sacrificed themselves: «Besides the story of an amazing human being who gave his courage and ultimate sacrifice for his team and country»<sup>65</sup>. O'Brien continues saying it makes sense that sacrifice be paid tribute with sacrifice: «Crazy story right? Now it's all starting to make a little more sense on why CrossFitters make a big deal out of Memorial Day and Murph. It's the least we can do to honor the courage and selfless sacrifice that was made that day.»<sup>66</sup> Lisbeth Darsh, a CrossFit writer and former aircraft maintenance officer in the US Air Force tells a similar story. She sees in named CrossFit workouts a way to let the memory of fallen service people live on: «Perhaps folks would rather not remember. Remembering is a hard thing, a painful thing. It's not fun, so it's easier to forget, to gloss over. [...] Honor these heroes, thank them, and let their memories live on.»<sup>67</sup> Most narratives about remembering heroes are wrapped in ideas of remembering those who fought for freedom.<sup>68</sup>

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62 Berger 2010.

63 O'Brien 2018.

64 O'Brien 2018.

65 O'Brien 2018.

66 O'Brien 2018.

67 Darsh 2017.

68 See Schrock/Schrock 2017.



## 6. Mourning

Mourning, in Victorian times, did not just follow etiquette but produced a rich material history.<sup>69</sup> The fascination (or obsession) of Victorian times with dogs contributed to those material practices. This fascination with dogs was partly rooted in ideas of loyalty and courage attributed to dogs and the «desire to project a readable subjectivity onto the animal».<sup>70</sup> The description of Sayers' dog Lion as «chief mourner»<sup>71</sup> at the funeral procession, therefore, fits quite well into the Victorian imagination. Similarly, the image of the dog as chief mourner at the feet of their masters' coffin or grave, the imagery of the «dog mourner»<sup>72</sup>, was a popular theme in Victorian dog portraiture.<sup>73</sup> Teresa Magnum, in this context, even talks about a «desire to *be* monumentalized by an animal's grief».<sup>74</sup> Dogs, it seems, were a key ingredient in representing mourning as something that is lived, experienced, and communicated.<sup>75</sup>

Huggins argues that memorials tell us something about the perceived identity of the deceased.<sup>76</sup> He calls gravestones «spaces for public display»<sup>77</sup>. The dog, then, not only represents its deceased master,<sup>78</sup> but represents «those qualities people sought in fellow humans – attentiveness, unconditional love, courage, loyalty so unwavering it persists even in the face of death.»<sup>79</sup>

Unlike Tom Sayers whose memorial resides surrounded by plants at Highgate Cemetery and is watched over by his chief mourner, Lion, when CrossFitters perform these Hero Workouts, they become chief mourners, living displays of the perceived identity of these national heroes. By remembering the sacrifice of Lt Murphy and his fellow service members in service to their nation through bodily suffering. Yet, these bodily practices are not simply an act of remembrance of these falling service people, but they are a lived and experienced communication of the values attributed to that particular person – values that are thought to persist in and through-

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69 See Magnum 2007, 16.

70 Magnum 2002, 36.

71 *The Spectator* 1866.

72 McHugh 2004, 97.

73 See Magnum 2002, 38; McHugh 2004, 97–98.

74 Magnum 2007, 19.

75 See Joseph/Tucker 2014, 111.

76 See Huggins 2012, 485.

77 Huggins 2012, 482.

78 See Magnum 2007, 38.

79 Magnum 2007, 35.

out death and are closely linked to ideas of a nation and a sense of duty to that nation.

Remembrance of the dead and intimate links to the nation are by no means unique to CrossFit. In fact, sportive practices do not just serve bodily fitness or entertainment purposes, but they are closely linked to questions of identity, culture, a sense of nationhood, and a mediation of remembering.<sup>80</sup> In such a mediation of remembering, the athletes often become the mediators or the «*agents of remembrance*»<sup>81</sup>. As agents, athletes often draw on a range of shared symbols, values and ideas and make them visible on and through their bodies. For example, patriotism and the idea of the homeland enacted and exhibited through bodily practices can become crucial ingredients in remembering, as Brentin shows in his study of Croatian football.<sup>82</sup>

Some of the practices of remembrance go beyond the body of the athlete and include fans and spectators in the stadium. Foster and Woodthorpe argue that in soccer, the observance of a minute's silence or giving applause serves to strengthen group cohesion and a «fictive kinship associated with a football club»<sup>83</sup>. As such, the practice of remembrance expressed through silence or applause raises the question over who is remembered, by whom, and in what form. Thus, Foster and Woodthorpe argue that «acts of remembrance at football games need to be regarded not just as commemoration but also as tools to demonstrate who is <in> and who is <out> of the football community»<sup>84</sup>. When national service heroes are commemorated, such as in the Hero Workouts, we can expand on Foster and Woodthorpe's approach to remembrance and argue that Hero Workouts can become a tool to demonstrate who is in or out of the community of the imagined nation. This question becomes particularly relevant when CrossFit athletes (professional and everyday athletes) around the world perform workouts named exclusively after US-American soldiers. What meaning, for example, does a Hero Workout hold for an athlete in Europe and how do they relate to the nation imagined through the bodily practice? What meaning does a Hero workout hold when it is performed by an athlete such as the author of this paper: the author comes from Austria, a country where the armed forces are most visible in public life during emergency aid (e.g. flooding), or the highly controversial and populist re-intro-

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80 See Wertsch 2002, 117.

81 Brentin 2016, 862.

82 See Brentin 2016, 863.

83 Foster/Woodthorpe 2012, 53.

84 Foster/Woodthorpe 2012, 62.

duction of border control at select border checkpoints during what has been labelled the «migration crisis». Further, what meaning do these workouts hold in a political climate that seems increasingly divisive, in a climate where motivations for military interventions and the outcomes of these interventions do not necessarily overlap and are subject to debate?<sup>85</sup>

## 7. *Remembering Heroes*

Wertsch argues that «collective remembering is a matter of agents using cultural tools, especially narratives.»<sup>86</sup> CrossFit Hero Workouts can be understood as cultural tools not just «in the form of narrative texts»,<sup>87</sup> but as bodily, embodied, lived, practiced, experienced, and suffered-through bodily practice. This bodily practice in the form of suffering-through not only might remind athletes of the sacrifice of fallen service members for their nation, but the workouts become a body-political enactment of the nation, nationhood, and national identity.

On several occasions when a Hero workout was the «workout of the day» in one of the CrossFit boxes (gyms) I have worked out in the UK and the US, athletes were briefed with a mini-biography of the name-giving soldier and their sacrifice for their country. Athletes were encouraged to be mindful of the soldier's sacrifice during the workout. The spirit of remembrance can also be observed online when athletes comment on websites or social media when a Hero workout is posted: one CrossFit athlete who participated in the annual performance of the workout Murph (usually on Memorial Day weekend) commented on the official CrossFit website: «In your honor, Murph, I'll think of what you and so many others gave up for me. Thanks for the blood, sweat and tears.»<sup>88</sup> CrossFit coach William Imbo writes about Murph: «Murph» is not simply another workout we do in a class to increase our fitness before moving on to whatever else we have going on in the day. It is a workout designed to honor and remember the men and women of the armed forces that have lost their lives in defense of our freedom. And as is the case with every Hero workout, it has a story of courage and sacrifice behind it.»<sup>89</sup>

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85 See Zachary/Deloughery/Downes 2017, 749–82; Downes/O'Rourke 2016, 43–89.

86 Wertsch 2002, 2.

87 Wertsch 2002, 117.

88 CrossFit 2005.

89 Imbo 2015.

Chidester defines religion as something that transcends the ordinary.<sup>90</sup> Imbo's statement that Murph is not «another» workout lifts the embodied and performed workout out of the ordinary and transcends it. Drawing on Chidester, we need to ask what dimension the bodily suffering that the workout inflicts might add. Höpflinger argues that imaginations of the nation are often inscribed with (civil) religious ideas.<sup>91</sup> Doing a Hero Workout, then, transforms the thinking and imagining of the nation and nationhood into religious practice: the body performs nationhood. In turn, as bodily practice, these Hero Workouts transform the abstract concept of the nation into something tangible and real. Doing so, these workouts allow athletes to feel connected to and act as re-affirmation and renewal of their loyalty to the nation. As such, this paper stipulates that these Hero Workouts are religious practice as much as they are political practices. Nations need to become visible (or made visible) through material and visual practices.<sup>92</sup> Practices of remembrance, as Gabriella Elgenius argues, are part and parcel of this act of nation building; they «provide justifications for deaths that otherwise would go unexplained in an increasingly secular world and may provide comfort during times of war since these persist over time and conform – in form – to established patterns of mourning.»<sup>93</sup>

Elgenius further argues that symbols, ceremonies, and rituals can «turn into powerful political instruments by symbolizing unity and commonality without compromising private associations of nationhood.»<sup>94</sup> Private or informal equivalents to official or public symbols of the nation are nothing new,<sup>95</sup> and as such, these Hero workouts might seem trivial (in the sense that there is nothing more to them than remembering and honoring fallen service-people). What happens when a private organization (CrossFit), independently run gyms (CrossFit boxes), and private individuals (CrossFitters) perform nationhood?

The example of CrossFit shows that the boundaries between the public, the private, and the political are blurry when it comes to the nation and nationhood. It also poses the question why individuals and communities, in addition to public events of remembrance, engage in more private forms of embodying the nation. In the case of CrossFit, a number of former military personnel are involved in shaping CrossFit. Dave Castro, for

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90 See Chidester 2005, 1.

91 See Höpflinger 2015, 55–77.

92 See Elgenius 2018, 2.

93 Elgenius 2018, 3.

94 Elgenius 2018, 186.

95 See Elgenius 2018, 9.

example, who is responsible for the annual CrossFit Games competition, is a former Navy SEAL.<sup>96</sup> More importantly, however, it might have to do with creating an aura of credibility. The first Hero Workouts started popping up at the CrossFit website at a time when CrossFit was still relatively young and not well known. Mrozek argues that in the late 19th and early 20th century, civic and military leaders were used to lend credibility to sports:

Numerous political leaders, particularly those emerging from the genteel tradition, and a growing cadre of Army and Navy officers were captivated by the psychology of victory; and they linked sport to a general program for renewing their society and reordering world affairs. They included the likes of Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt, secretaries of war such as Elihu Root, Army Chief of Staff Leonard Wood, and Rear Admiral R.D. Evans who commanded the North Atlantic Fleet - men who placed great emphasis on personal commitment as the cornerstone of public achievement. As these politicians and officers made their public pronouncements and sometimes pursued practical policies to promote sport and organized physical education, they came to form a highly visible and reputable constituency strengthening sport's grasp at institutional permanence and importance. Although some of these leaders specifically sought to alter the character of middle- and working-class Americans by changing their sporting behavior, their impact may have been even greater in lending the dignity of their offices to sports such as football and boxing that had once been the realm of children and ruffians. Thus, they helped to change the climate in which sport could emerge to prominence, even while they made some specific contribution by advocating sports of their own choosing.<sup>97</sup>

Drawing on Mrozek, one can speculate that the narratives of courage, sacrifice, of favourite workouts of the fallen service members, intentionally or not, helped lend credibility and authority to CrossFit as an emerging sport discipline. Remembering and embodying the nation, then, can serve purposes that might be unrelated to nationhood.

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96 See Myser 2013.

97 Mrozek 1983, 30.

## 8. Concluding Evaluation

What, then, connects Tom Sayers memorial at Highgate dating back to the 19th century with workouts of remembrance created at the dawn of the 21st century? Sayers and CrossFit seem unrelated and separated by time, yet the act of remembrance ties them together. This may seem like a trivial observation, but it is this very triviality that lends the link its power. Richard Holt argues that «Sporting heroes are both universal and particular. They resemble each other and differ from each other. They have common qualities like courage and will-power but they also have specific national and social characteristics. [...] Heroes are not just gifted individuals we admire; their lives are woven into stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.»<sup>98</sup> In the 2016 version of its website, CrossFit writes that «The community that spontaneously arises when people do these workouts together is a key component of why CrossFit is so effective [...] Harnessing the natural camaraderie [...] yields an intensity that cannot be matched by other means.»<sup>99</sup> In her critique of Robert M. Bellah's concept of civil religion, Marcela Cristi argues that «The notion of civil religion needs to be framed at a higher level of generality – that is, as a phenomenon that is neither just civil, nor just religious, but also essentially political.»<sup>100</sup> What we can learn then from Sayers and CrossFit, the coverage of Sayers' funeral, his now overgrown tombstone, and the popularity of CrossFit today is that acts of remembrance and communities that emerge are never merely trivial nor innocent but political. They are intimately, materially, and bodily tied to political discourses of their day and age. Even when events or fans seem apolitical, as A. Kadir Yildirim points out in the context of Istanbul soccer teams and fans, he argues that the apoliticalness is itself political and has been politically engineered.<sup>101</sup>

Sayers and the CrossFit pantheon show that sport is not innocent and is always tied in with social conflict and political power. Remembering heroes, sportive or otherwise, then, should always come with the cautionary tale of what these heroes reveal or disguise: why do we remember, why do we long for heroes, and why and how do we – or should we – remember them and immortalize them?

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98 Holt 1998, 12.

99 CrossFit HQ 2016.

100 Cristi 2001, 13.

101 See Yildirim 2019, 232–251.

CrossFit's Pantheon also raises the question of the social and political context in which what we could – very provocatively – call hero worship emerged. Scholars across the disciplines have long pointed to the flourishing exchange between popular culture, popular imagination, and geopolitics. Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, for example, argue that «We live immersed in a world of popular culture. It is composed of a bewildering array of narratives, images, and sounds that we often plug ourselves into for fun or just to relax. But it is also more than that: it is a space of geopolitical action.»<sup>102</sup> What I am concerned with, then, is the imaginary that objects of and for remembrance such as Tom Sayers' tombstone as well as exercising bodies foster. How does the aesthetics of Tom Sayers' tombstone connect the «there and then» to ideals of power and heroism as a heritage from antiquity? In the «there and then» of his contemporaries the monumental tomb represented class, class conflict, ideas of appropriate places and maintaining and transgressing boundaries. In the «here and now», Sayers' tomb – while probably forgotten by a large majority – bears material witness to socio-cultural heritage and cultural memory.

The question remains whether or not and how the aesthetics of «remembering bodies», of sweaty, exhausted, suffering, male and female bodies performing these Hero WODs in the here and now might contribute to processes of cultural memory. In her analysis of Helvetia, the national personification of Switzerland, Anna-Katharina Höpflinger argues that:

Helvetia is an idealistic figure representing an imagined collectivity. Helvetia's depiction is strongly connected to shared normative and aesthetic values; this figure is not only a personification of a collectivity, but of an ideal one, based strongly on positively connoted and propagandized shared values.<sup>103</sup>

Both the construction of Tom Sayers' tombstone and CrossFit Hero WODs can then be understood as lessons in how cultural and socio-political memory is both constructed and materialized. In particular in the context of CrossFit, these bodily practices of remembrance are an example of how ideas of the nation reach out to and engulf leisurely activities and bind communities. CrossFit Hero WODs are also an example of how such memory and a sense of community that have geopolitical relevance are laid across the body,<sup>104</sup> written into the body, and experienced through the

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102 Dittmer/Bos 2019, 1. See Kirby 2018, 1–22.

103 Höpflinger 2015, 73.

104 See Brown 2008, xxiii.

body. Ultimately, remembering sporting heroes in a leisurely context and the aesthetics of sporting bodies<sup>105</sup> then and now cannot be separated from an aestheticization of politics and, in fact, this aestheticization seems to become democratized through phenomena such as CrossFit. Of course, I do not want to argue that this aestheticization, as Walter Benjamin does,<sup>106</sup> inevitably leads to war. And yet, it remains ethically (and problematically) entangled in issues of politics, race, gender, and social power structures because remembering heroes – who we choose to remember and who we forget or ignore – is always a political act.

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105 See Hartley 1992, 119–139.

106 See Benjamin 2008, 41.



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### III. Image Cultivation



# Public Events at a Historic-Religious Site Highgate Cemetery in London as a Cultural Practice

Marie-Therese Mäder

Aside from being a place for burying and remembering the dead, Highgate cemetery also serves as a historic site and public space. This double purpose is embraced by the website of the cemetery: «Highgate Cemetery has some of the finest funerary architecture in the country. It is a place of peace and contemplation where a romantic profusion of trees, memorials and wildlife flourish.»<sup>1</sup> The Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust (hereafter, the Trust), a registered charity, runs the page. Referred to as *The Friends*, they organise activities for people interested in the cemetery. Among the most popular activities, and the only way to enter into West Highgate Cemetery, are the guided tours presented by volunteers.<sup>2</sup> Besides the daily tours other activities include talks, evening tours, and exhibitions. The Trust orchestrates and regulates all these events by setting opening hours and stipulating the rules for such visits. They set the parameters of what is and what isn't permitted. For example, since 2017 the famous pop singer George Michael has been buried at Highgate cemetery. On the website the Trust announced the following:

George Michael's grave is in a private part of Highgate Cemetery which is not accessible to visitors.

Friends should contact the family for access.

Tributes should not be left at the cemetery as there is no space to receive them. There is an informal memorial in Highgate Village.

George Michael's grave will not be visited on tours of Highgate cemetery.

Some fans have asked how to make a donation in memory of George Michael. If you would like to donate to the Friends of Highgate Ceme-

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1 <https://highgatecemetery.org/> (accessed June 2, 2017).

2 Traditionally, most of those buried at West Highgate were members of the Anglican church, with some exceptions. In East Highgate the graves of members of other religions, religious traditions, and social-political groups such as Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Atheists, and Communists are also well represented, and this part of the cemetery is accessible without a tour.

tery Trust, the charity which cares for Highgate Cemetery, please click the donate button. The Friends do not make a profit because they reinvest their income to maintain and enhance the cemetery.<sup>3</sup>

The example of George Michael's grave shows how the Trust regulates the cemetery's practices and usages. Obviously there is a private part in West Highgate that is not open to the public. The relatives' wishes may have formed part of the decision to make the grave non-accessible for visitors. But in addition the *Friends of Highgate* probably feared West Highgate Cemetery might become swamped by mourning fans, by their tributes and ultimately turning it into a place of mass pilgrimage as is the case with other tombs in East Highgate notably the grave of Karl Marx.<sup>4</sup> The Trust argues that there is not enough space to receive the tributes, which, on the one hand, is a little surprising given the spatial dimensions of the cemetery. On the other hand, however, the policy might be deemed reasonable remembering the pictures in the press of the huge piles of flowers, letters, candles and pictures among other things in front of George Michael's house in Camden (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: A place for mourning in front of George Michael's house in Camden, London (Image: Georgie Gillard, 2017).<sup>5</sup>

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3 <https://highgatecemetery.org/news> (accessed June 2, 2017).

4 See the contribution of Baldassare Scolari in this book and York 2002.

5 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/-/article-4526732/index.html#i-bca8aeca2a6faca> (accessed August 19, 2020).



The online text mentions that friends should contact the family for access. Another rule at Highgate says that there is special access available for people with relatives buried in the cemetery. For Highgate Cemetery is not just a historic site but is still in use to serve new interments. The information that the singer's grave isn't shown during tours refers to the organised tours during which the visitors walk through a small part of West Highgate that is inaccessible apart from such guided tours. The Friends of Highgate Cemetery perhaps don't want to arouse false expectations. Nevertheless, besides the religious practice of burials at Highgate, the popular and often sold-out visitor tours in West Highgate play an important role in presenting and experiencing the cemetery. The tours are offered in different ways, such as late tours, tours after dusk, or even as special events on November 1, the feast of All Saints. In addition to the tours talks and other events frequently take place.

In this study I will argue that the tours and other activities at Highgate Cemetery can be understood as a specific form of performative practice comprising a socio-religious dimension to regulate the usage of the cemetery. To understand what kind of practices take place in the context of the cemetery I will ask how this historic-religious site is represented in the complementary materials, notably the website with photos, text and videos, the catalogue, the flyers and the tours and how they comprise performative practices with a socio-religious dimension.

### *To Remember Human Finitude in the Paratexts of the Cemetery*

Highgate Cemetery serves not only as a place for the deceased to rest in peace but also as a space where multiple activities for those left behind are carried out (as described above). These cultural practices are performed in the space of the cemetery and, following Stuart Hall, give meaning to the place:

The emphasis on cultural practices is important. It is participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects and events. Things ›in themselves‹ rarely, if ever, have any one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning. Even something as obvious as a stone can be a stone, a boundary marker or a piece of sculpture, depending on what it means - that is, within a certain context of use, [...]. It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them - how we represent them - that we give them a meaning. In part, we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation, which we bring

to them. In part, we give things meaning by how we use them, or integrate them into our everyday practices.<sup>6</sup>

Highgate is full of and surrounded by many different meaning-making practices. But how exactly do practices give meaning to a space, by whom are they represented, received and interpreted? To answer this question Gerard Genette, a French literary theorist introduces the term *paratexts* originating from the study of literature but also widely used in film and media studies.<sup>7</sup> The concept describes how a text is presented by means of, for example, the materiality and graphics of a book edition, interviews with the author, or critics. Genette explains how paratexts influence and shape the reception and consumption of a text.

One does not always know if one should consider that they [paratexts] belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in the strongest meaning: to *make it present*, to assure its presence in the world, its «reception» and its consumption, in the form, nowadays at least, of a book.<sup>8</sup>

To transfer this concept to a cemetery it can be stated that Highgate is surrounded by different practices that present it as a specific place. One purpose of paratexts is to guide the reader's — or in the case of the cemetery the visitor's — attention in a specific direction. To understand the meaning of the cemetery therefore means to apprehend the practices and discourses that present it:

The paratext thus is empirically composed of an assorted set of practices and discourse of all sorts and of all ages, which I incorporate under this term in the name of community interest, or convergence of effects, which seems to me more important than their diversity of aspects.<sup>9</sup>

Genette highlights two other objectives of paratexts, namely *community interests* and *convergence of effects*. *Community interests* can be understood as the instructions and rulings that meet the intentions of a certain group. In the case of Highgate the intention is shaped and ruled by the trust of The Friends. They fundamentally influence the representation and reception of

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6 Hall 2013, xix.

7 Böhnke 2007, Genette/Maclean 1991.

8 Genette/Maclean 1991, 261.

9 Genette/Maclean 1991.

the cemetery with the production and coordination of paratexts. The second purpose of paratexts described as the *convergence of effects* captures the meaning-making practices that surround the text. These practices are diverse but are constitutive of how one understands, experiences, and perceives the cemetery in a certain way. Some practices are allowed because they fit into how the cemetery should be perceived and other activities are not. For example it is not permitted to use the cemetery as a picnic area and neither are you allowed to drink, or eat a snack during the organized tours.

Between Stuart Hall's cultural practices and Genette's concept of paratexts are some remarkable similarities. In both concepts, usage and integration into everyday practices constitute the meaning of objects and events. The cemetery doesn't have a meaning by itself. The visitors, the tour guides, relatives and friends of the deceased, and even scholars interpret Highgate and its wealth of statues, steles, and sculptures while visiting it. Furthermore, the public talks, publications about the cemetery, films and the website shape a certain idea of the cemetery and influence its perception. These different media are all interpretations or in Genette's terms 'paratexts' that surround, prolong and present the cemetery.

Not all events or paratexts connected to Highgate take place inside the area of the cemetery. The website, a diversity of publications including books, postcards, maps, and flyers can be consumed independently of a cemetery visit. In this respect they differ from the tours and the talks, during which attendees need to be present at the cemetery. The talks usually take place in the restored Anglican chapel at the entrance to Highgate West cemetery. To differentiate these two types of paratexts Genette distinguishes between *peritexts* and *epitexts*. A peritext «necessarily has a positioning, which one can situate in the relationship to the text itself.»<sup>10</sup> The relationship to the text includes a temporal and spatial connection implying that the peritext is located within the text. In the case of Highgate the peritext is located in the space of the cemetery. For example, to join the tours or to listen to a talk you need to be present at the cemetery. Whereas you can read the website from any place in the world that is connected to the Internet. The same can be applied to the Highgate booklet,<sup>11</sup> the map or the illustrated book that I bought at the giftshop at the entrance to West Highgate.<sup>12</sup> These publications, all edited by the Friends of Highgate

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10 Genette/Maclean 1991, 263.

11 Bulmer 2014.

12 Parker/Swannell 1989.

Cemetery Trust, lie on my desk. I can grasp them to refresh my memory about the famous personalities buried at Highgate. Genette calls this kind of information *epitexts*:

[a]round the text again, but at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance, are all the messages which are situated, at least originally, outside the book: generally with the backing of the media (interviews, conversations), or under the cover of private communication correspondences, private journals, and the like.<sup>13</sup>

Again the quote from Genette originally refers to the epitexts of books or texts but can be transferred to epitexts of a cemetery. Epitexts circulate spatially and temporally independently and are located outside of the cemetery, as is the case for example with the document *Highgate Cemetery Rules*<sup>14</sup> that is published on the website. It regulates opening times, the safety and conduct of visitors, and sets out rules and restrictions relating to photography and filming, children and dogs at the cemetery, grave passes, vehicles and burials.

The talks and events provide an excellent illustration of how a peritext situates itself in relation to its text, which for our study is the 'text' of Highgate cemetery. A preview of the events at Highgate is announced on the website. The preview shows a set of practices and discourses as Genette describes it. By integrating these practices into our everyday life, we implicitly ascribe, according to Hall, a certain meaning to the space of the cemetery. But how can we analyse these meaning making practices? Genette suggests the following questions to analyse the paratexts:

To put this in a more concrete way: defining an element of the paratext consists in determining its position (the question where?), its date of appearance, and eventually of disappearance (when?), its mode of existence, verbal or other (how?), the characteristics of its communicating instance, addresser and addressee (from whom? to whom?), and the functions which give purpose to its message (what is it good for?).<sup>15</sup>

These mainly general questions need to be further adapted to the cemetery's paratexts. It can be asked where, when, how, by whom, for whom and for what aim are the set of practices carried out at Highgate? One purpose of the cemetery's paratexts is that they converge on dealing with

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13 Genette/Maclean 1991, 264.

14 <https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Rules.pdf> (accessed June 2, 2017).

15 Genette/Maclean 1991, 263.

death and its diversity of aspects. People accomplish together various practices in the public space of the paratexts to remember human finitude. Jay Winter uses the term «performative acts» to describe such practices of remembrance:

The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form. The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion, which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in its sticking power, its resistance to erasure or oblivion. Hence affect is always inscribed in performative acts in general and in the performance of memory in particular.<sup>16</sup>

According to Winter performative acts are mediated through the body or expressed in art and connected with emotions in order not to forget. At Highgate a diversity of acts is performed during the various cultural practices. These performative acts include a wide spectrum in dealing with death and can be considered as memory practices aiming at the «resistance to the erasure of oblivion.» These acts of memory may dispose of a religious dimension in such a way that they are dealing with the uncontrollable sphere of the *conditio humana*, namely death. Fritz Stolz describes this aspect as one of the general aims of religion.<sup>17</sup> Religious practices often transform the uncontrollable into a controlled sphere as «religion has to provide a general orientation: it has to tie the experience of the uncontrollable to the controllable aspects of reality, and it has to transform uncontrollable into controllable fields.»<sup>18</sup> Accordingly a cemetery can be understood as a space where the uncontrollable is transformed into a controllable sphere. Transformation processes can take place in the diversity of performative acts of peritexts and epitexts. In the following discussion it will be asked how the events organized at Highgate between September and December 2016 deal with death and human finitude in the single performative acts of peritexts and epitexts that are embraced as cultural practices. The website of Highgate cemetery with the announcements of the events and references will be used as source materials.

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16 Winter 2010, 12.

17 Stolz 1988, 80.

18 Pezzoli-Olgiati 2004, 123.

## *Highgate Events as Practices to Resist the Erasure of Oblivion*

In August 2016 a diversity of events and activities were announced on the Highgate website.<sup>19</sup> Two special tours and four talks took place, one of which included a magic show. The events were scheduled between September 3 and December 20. The following analysis asks in what way the practices described in the epitexts and peritexts of the cemetery are connected to acts of memory.

The event *Bats in the Cemetery* on September 3, 2016 starts with a presentation by Huma Pearce, an ecologist. She introduces the bat species at Highgate that the attendees will later be looking for in the cemetery (fig. 2).

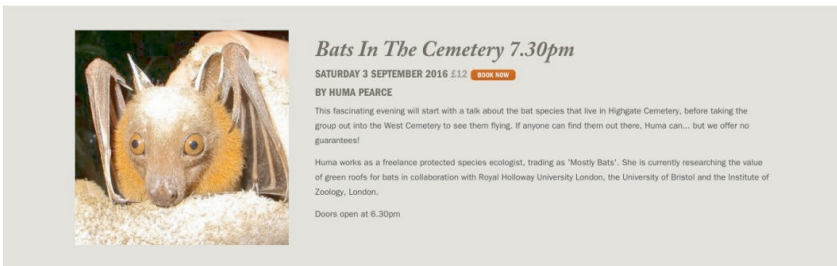


Fig. 2: *Announcement of a talk and a special tour in which the participants are looking for bats (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).*

The event and especially the walk takes place during the evening because the bats are nocturnal and the likelihood of observing one is higher at that time. Many other animals live in the cemetery but bats bear a dualistic meaning because of their night activity. On the one hand their creepy image connects them to daemons and ghosts and especially vampires. On the other hand they are perceived as animals that may fight against evil powers like the devil or witches and they are appreciated as bringing good luck. It can be suggested that a focus on bats at Highgate combines daemonic and mystical dimensions with the actual place of the dead. The combination of

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19 Unfortunately, the preview of the events from 2016 is no longer accessible on the website. The screenshots of the announcements were taken in August 2016. The quotations from the announcement will therefore not be referenced.

the cemetery and the act of bat-watching fosters a specific religious narrative of the supernatural aspects of death.<sup>20</sup>

Three other talks give an insight into religious-historical topics. Lee Jackson «obsessed with the social history of Victorian London»<sup>21</sup> and author of several books about the same topic<sup>22</sup> explains in *Grave Nuisance, a Sanitary History of the Victorian Cemetery* how the dangerous sanitary situation of the cemeteries in the London churchyards resulted in the construction of the Victorian cemeteries outside of London (fig. 3).



**Talk: Grave Nuisance, a Sanitary History of the Victorian Cemetery 7.30pm**

THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2016 87 [BOOK NOW](#)

BY LEE JACKSON

The graveyards and burialgrounds of early nineteenth-century London were full to overflowing, decried as 'plague-spots', harbouring disease and decay. But there was a great reluctance to address the problem of the capital's oversubscribed churchyards: clergymen wanted to retain their customary burial fees and the government was unwilling to interfere.

Lee Jackson, author of *Dirty Old London*, will explain the 'sanitary' origins of the Victorian cemetery, from the cholera epidemic of 1832 to the honors of Eton Chapel, and the Spa Fields scandal of 1845. He will focus on two little-known figures - George Carden, self-styled 'Founder of the system of ex-urban sepulture', and the burial reform agitator George Walker - explaining how, after decades of struggle, London finally obtained a decent burial for most of its citizens.

Doors open 7pm

Fig. 3: Lee Jacksons talks about the sanitary situation before the construction of Victorian cemeteries (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).



**Talk: Material Memories: Victorian Mourning Jewellery 7.30pm**

THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER 2016 87 [BOOK NOW](#)

BY DR NATASHA AWAIS-DEAN

Through their physical proximity to the body, jewelled goods are highly personal objects. Jewellery has the power to create strong memories, either through its materiality or in invocations implied through inscriptions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Victorian mourning jewellery.

In this talk, Natasha Awais-Dean illustrates the art of mourning jewellery in this period and explores its sentiment and significance to the people who wore it.

Doors open at 7.00pm

Fig. 4: The picture shows a pendant made with the deceased's hair (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).

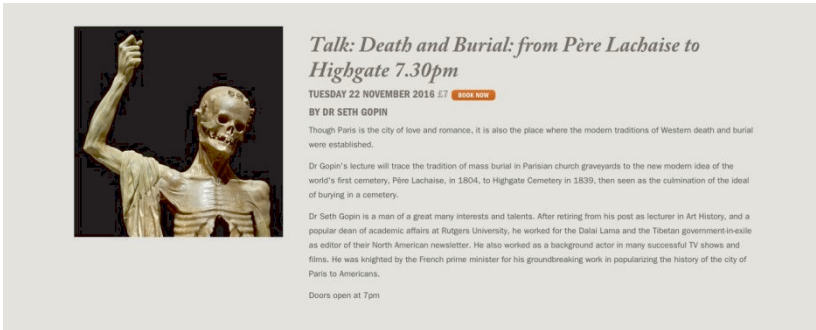
20 Paul Wirz provides an overview of the meaning of bats in art and religion in different geographical regions across the globe from India, China, Japan, South and North America to Europe. See Wirz 1948, 275–278.

21 [http://www.victorianlondon.org/lee/about\\_the\\_author.htm](http://www.victorianlondon.org/lee/about_the_author.htm) (accessed September 5, 2020)

22 Jackson 2014.

Natasha Awais-Dean, a historian, explains the practice of mourning jewellery in Victorian times (fig. 4). The topic explains practices connected to death as part of the material culture in the Victorian era.

The third talk in this series of religious-historical topics is *Death and Burial: from Père Lachaise to Highgate*. Dr. Seth Gopin, a retired lecturer in art history provides an insight into the practice of mass burials in Parisian church yards (fig. 5).



**Talk: Death and Burial: from Père Lachaise to Highgate 7.30pm**  
TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2016 £7 [BOOK NOW](#)  
BY DR SETH GOPIN

Though Paris is the city of love and romance, it is also the place where the modern traditions of Western death and burial were established.

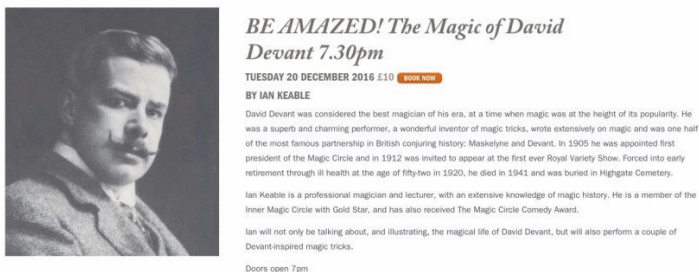
Dr Gopin's lecture will trace the tradition of mass burial in Parisian church graveyards to the new modern idea of the world's first cemetery, Père Lachaise, in 1804, to Highgate Cemetery in 1839, then seen as the culmination of the ideal of burying in a cemetery.

Dr Seth Gopin is a man of a great many interests and talents. After retiring from his post as lecturer in Art History, and a popular dean of academic affairs at Rutgers University, he worked for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile as editor of their North American newsletter. He also worked as a background actor in many successful TV shows and films. He was knighted by the French prime minister for his groundbreaking work in popularizing the history of the city of Paris to Americans.

Doors open at 7pm

Fig. 5: The memento mori figure is not immediately connected to the topic but is at least a catchy subject (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).

The final announcement of a talk in the 2016 series revitalises the life of a famous early 20<sup>th</sup> century magician, regarded as the 'best magician in his day', David Devant who is buried at Highgate cemetery (fig. 6).



**BE AMAZED! The Magic of David Devant 7.30pm**  
TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER 2016 £10 [BOOK NOW](#)  
BY IAN KEABLE

David Devant was considered the best magician of his era, at a time when magic was at the height of its popularity. He was a superb and charming performer, a wonderful inventor of magic tricks, wrote extensively on magic, and was one half of the most famous partnership in British conjuring history; Maskelyne and Devant. In 1905 he was appointed first president of the Magic Circle and in 1912 was invited to appear at the first ever Royal Variety Show. Forced into early retirement through ill health at the age of fifty-two in 1920, he died in 1941 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery.

Ian Keable is a professional magician and lecturer, with an extensive knowledge of magic history. He is a member of the Inner Magic Circle with Gold Star, and has also received The Magic Circle Comedy Award.

Ian will not only be talking about, and illustrating, the magical life of David Devant, but will also perform a couple of Devant-inspired magic tricks.


Doors open 7pm

Fig. 6: The Magician David Devant and his performances are at the centre of this talk (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).



Ian Keable, a lecturer and magician with «an extensive knowledge of magic history»<sup>23</sup> according to the announcement will not only talk about David Devant but he will also perform «a couple of Devant-inspired magic tricks.» Illustrated by a black and white portrait of the magician, the combination of talk and performance is announced. Again a specific topic connected to the cemetery is chosen. Similar to the bat talk by Huma Pearce the presentation is enriched with a practice that involves the attendees actively. Magic tricks are usually interactive so that the spectators participate in the performance. The «Devant-inspired tricks» can be understood as a kind of memory practice that revitalises and passes on a magic legacy. The audience of the talk become part of this act.

Another event refers to an explicit Christian practice and takes place at East Highgate. All Saints' Evening is celebrated on November 1 (fig. 7). Grave owners, the Friends of Highgate Cemetery trust and children under 18 years have free access. Everybody else needs to pay £4.



*East Cemetery candle-lighting late opening for All Saints' Evening*

**TUESDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2016 TICKETS £4. FREE FOR GRAVE OWNERS, FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE CEMETERY TRUST, AND UNDER-18S ACCOMPANIED BY ADULTS. [BOOK NOW](#)**

East Cemetery open until 7pm, last entry 6.30pm

All Saints' Day is a day for the general commemoration of those who have gone before us. Many grave-owners at Highgate Cemetery already place candles on their graves around this date and this late opening is to give a wider opportunity for reflection and remembrance.

This opening is restricted to the main tarmac paths of the East Cemetery, as far as Marx to the east and the Chester Road gate to the south. If grave-owners wish to visit their graves in other locations in the East they may do so entirely at their own risk. The West Cemetery will not be open.

- Candles will be available for sale. You may bring your own candles, which should be in fireproof containers. Bring matches too!
- Each person should bring a torch
- Please wear sturdy shoes, especially if it is wet
- Under 18s must be accompanied by an adult.
- Uncovered glass containers will be removed following the ceremony, as will any extinguished candles.

Fig. 7: *Lighted candles are put on a grave to remember the deceased (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org>).*

Traditionally friends and family members visit the graves of their deceased on All Saint's Evening. As demonstrated by the fact that there is an entrance fee, other people, cemetery tourists, are also expected to attend the religious celebration. In this case there is no introductory talk, as the practice is anchored in a religious tradition and people attending the celebration are presumed to be mostly familiar with the proceeding and its meaning.

23 See footnote 19.

The described events, talks and performances follow different purposes but all of them are connected on different levels, as epitexts or peritexts, to the cemetery. Through these acts Highgate becomes a place to remember the dead or to think about and deal with the participant's own finitude or to reflect more generally on human mortality. Be it a walk through the cemetery at dusk to spot bats, to get to know the Victorian burial politics or the purpose of Victorian mourning jewellery, to understand the practice of mass burials, to revitalise the tricks of the magician David Devant, or to participate in the celebration of All Saint's Evening. These paratexts include practices with specific acts in which the participants are meant to be emotionally involved. The participants might feel curiosity, joy, fear or even uneasiness depending on their personal and cultural background. Beside these scheduled events the daily tours provide the most important means of generating and nourishing tourist activities as well as providing revenue for the Trust.

In the following section I will analyse the important and popular cultural practice of guided tours at West Highgate. I participated in three tours in September 2015, September 2016, and August 2017 from which one specific tour (2016) will be analysed with a focus on the tour guide and the performed acts of memory.<sup>24</sup> It will be asked how the guide includes and addresses the participants, what is selected for remembrance during the tours and for what purpose and function?

### *The Socio-Religious Practice of Guided Tours*

The organised tour took place on September 8, 2016 with fifteen participants (Ps). The tour started at 15.30 and ended at 16.45. I took field notes during and after the tour and recorded the audio during the tour. As I participated in the tour myself the data has been gathered by a participating observation.<sup>25</sup> I was able to take photos that helped me to remember the posts where the tour guide (TG) stopped to provide the Ps with information. On the map below (fig. 8) the order of the twelve posts and the direction of the tour are indicated.

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24 There has been extensive scholarly research on tourism and the role guides play in this field. For an overview of the field and the specific aspect of tour guides see Weiler/Black 2015, 21–44.

25 Kawulich 2005; Merkens 1992.



Fig. 8: The map is pictured on the back of the flyer that is distributed at the entrance to the cemetery (Image: Marie-Therese Mäder 2017).

The applied method of gathering data in the field and later interpreting it evaluates how the tour shapes the reception of the cemetery. The data is analysed by a combination of two approaches namely sociological hermeneutics of knowledge and grounded theory.<sup>26</sup> The analysing process has been adapted to the collected data of the field notes and is divided into three steps.<sup>27</sup> In the first step the audio recording has been transcribed. Next the transcribed text has been extended with the photographs namely the photos have been assigned to the text so that text and images are synchronized in space and time. Finally, the text has been divided into different kind of actions accomplished by the TG and the Ps. This included ver-

26 Boehm 1994; Strübing 2014, 461–470.

27 Reichertz 2015, 522–523.

bal and nonverbal actions. This ‹open coding› was initially carried out without categorising them. In a second step, the so-called axial coding has been applied,<sup>28</sup> that categorised the actions with codes. To most of the actions several codes have been ascribed. The third step connects the codes and field notes to a meaningful whole in the process of selective coding.<sup>29</sup>

In the process of data interpretation the concept of paratext has been retained. As already mentioned it is understood as an *assorted set of practices* and discourse of all sorts for the *community interest* and *convergence of effects*.<sup>30</sup> As in the paragraph above the term *action* is closely related to *practice*. Actions are used in a more descriptive way whereas *practice* will be applied as soon as the actions are related to each other and interpreted.

In this context the definition of *community* embraces the social actors that are involved in the activities at Highgate namely the Friends of Highgate, their invited guests and the attending visitors. All of them constitute the endeavour of Highgate Cemetery in different ways. Regarding the tours the participants are divided into two main groups, namely the tour guide, acting in the name of the Friends trust and the participants of the tour. The *convergence of effects* is understood as the diversity of practices resulting in the presentation and interpretation of the cemetery. In the following analysis the general actions during the tour are discussed. Then in a second step and to be understood as selective coding<sup>31</sup> the information provided and exchanged during the tour is divided into peritexts and epitexts. Once again referring to the concept of paratexts discussed above, ‹peritexts› refer to events and facts taking place inside the cemetery and ‹epitexts› to information and events located outside the cemetery. In this instance epitexts had also been uttered inside the space of the cemetery during the tour but their reference is more loosely connected to the cemetery than is the case with peritexts. In the following analysis the three categories — actions, peritexts- and epitexts — are discussed with the assigned codes and illustrated with examples from the field notes (fig. 9).

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28 Strübing 2014, 467–468.

29 Strübing 2014, 468–469.

30 Genette 2010, 262.

31 Strübing 2014, 468–469.

Paratexts	Categories	Number of codes
actions	82	
TG talking		55
Ps walking and talking		25
Interaction TG with participants		13
TG giving instructions		11
Ps waiting		9
Ps by themselves		7
peritext: inside the cemetery	43	
technical-practical-cultural facts		21
art-historical facts		19
religious reference		5
vandalism		6
flora and fauna		3
restoration of the cemetery		3
epitext: outside the cemetery	25	
stories about personalities		18
friends of highgate		5
personal story of the tour guide		3

Fig. 9: Table with the absolute numbers and names of codes categorized by peritext and epitext.

During the three tours that I participated in I could observe that the guides follow a more or less fixed path through the cemetery telling largely the same stories about the graves and monuments, the deceased, and the people involved in the construction and maintenance of the cemetery during the heyday of the western part. These narratives are told to visitors whilst walking among the graves, steles and monuments. The tours represent a practice in a historic-religious site involving religious symbols, biographical stories, a park facility and historical facts.

Most of the *actions* (see the table in fig. 9) are repeatedly carried out during the tour. The Ps walk behind the guide, chat with each other or just wait until the TG starts to talk. The TG mainly talks, but he also occasionally gives instructions to the Ps. More often towards the end of the tour the Ps sneak away to take pictures or to look at other things than the ones included on the official tour route. The TG then requests the Ps to follow him more closely with the following wording on different occasions: «We are going up this way guys, sorry.»<sup>32</sup> Interactions between the TG and Ps

32 Mäder 2016, 19:12.

also frequently take place, be it between the group as a whole or just one person and the TG. In general the TG asks remarkably few questions and concludes a question on several occasions with: «It's no trick question!»<sup>33</sup> The questions often relate to practical or cultural aspects of the cemetery, such as the following example: «Why are the bodies put in by feet first? Because the relatives wanted to talk to their heads.»<sup>34</sup> As in this example the TG often answers his own questions. In general it is fair to say that the interactive part of the tour is very low. Most of the time the Ps listen to the guide and talk with each other while they are walking from one post to another.

At the posts the TG mostly conveys specific information about the cemetery. Six different kinds of peritexts can be discerned. Technical, practical and cultural facts are the most common. For example the TG explains that a grave is 20 feet deep and all made of brick so that the coffins can be stacked. «And the actual inside doesn't go straight, the bricks go slight bending. It's not full.»<sup>35</sup> Then a little less often art-historical facts are explained: «The half covered urns. It means the person is cast away but half covered means that the souls have room to leave to go to heaven. That's how they depict it.»<sup>36</sup> The other four categories of peritexts are also mentioned several times. These are references to vandalism like the following wording: «...remember I had been talking about vandalism and what they did...crazy people we don't know much of the history but we do know that it was really badly vandalised. It was before the friend's of Highgate took it over involved.»<sup>37</sup> The references to vandalism highlight how the Friends saved the cemetery from vandals by taking care of it. Equivalent to the quantity of vandalism references (five times) religious references are mentioned. They often comprise art-historical facts as the example mentioned above shows. Similar to that comment is the following description referring to a religious dimension: «The empty chair is the same actually as the urn with the shroud on it. The empty chair means the life has gone. The shroud half-over means the soul has had room to leave and go to heaven.»<sup>38</sup> Then the TG refers occasionally to the restoration work of the cemetery. This was the case when a P asked: «Is there still the line of chestnut trees? It says that in the literature. They separated the areas.» The TG an-

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33 Mäder 2016, 22:20.

34 Mäder 2016, 22:20.

35 Mäder 2016, 13:2.

36 Mäder 2016, 7:3.

37 Mäder 2016, 18:7.

38 Mäder 2016, 13:1.

swers: «Yes they are trying to build a nice safe path. But it's too dangerous to go there.»<sup>39</sup> He further mentions the high costs and efforts that need to be invested in the restoration of Highgate. A last version of a peritext is the reference to the flora and fauna at Highgate that are also sporadically highlighted: «Inside [of a vault in the Egyptian Avenue] is a species of spider. I am not sure how they got in there. But they can't even go out at night. It has to be complete pitch black to survive. And now they are in these walls. But don't worry...» Bats, the old tree population and the birds are also mentioned in this category. The peritexts mostly contain facts and deal remarkably seldom with the symbolic dimension of the cemetery. The facts are based on observations, an expert or an insider-knowledge such as the mechanics of the burials, the stories about vandalism, and the future or past restoration projects.

Another important part of the tour is subsumed under the category of epitexts divided into three code groups. The most common consists of stories about personalities buried in the cemetery. This kind of epitext occurs almost as often as art-historical and technical-practical-cultural facts. The TG tells participants about their lives and achievements, such as in relation to the tombstone of George Wombwell with a huge lion on it (fig. 10): «Now George Wombwell was at the time the biggest menagerist in England – or Europe – and he started off life as a shoemaker in Soho. And he wasn't making a lot of money. So he decided one day he was down the docks so he'd find some leather or whatever. And he bought two boa-constrictors off a couple of sailors and put 'em in cardboard boxes and took 'em round all the pubs in the East End. Charged people a penny to open the box and have a look at these pythons. And he ended up with lions, tigers, uhm, camels, giraffes, elephants, uhm – zebra, everything you name it. And he went all over the country. He was one of the biggest in his field. There's a coupla quite funny stories about this guy.»<sup>40</sup>

The stories about personalities mostly overlap with the ones described in the Highgate flyer with the map on the front (fig. 8). These include the coachman James William Selby, architect's wife Mary Emden, General Sir Loftus Otway, financier Julius Beer, writer Ellen Wood know under the name Mr. Henry Wood, and lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall. These life stories seem to be retold again and again in a dynamic and funny style in order to entertain the Ps. In the way they are presented they resemble more an oral version of a narrative than scripted facts. As biographical narratives

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39 Mäder 2016, 30:4.

40 Mäder 2016, 19:7.



Fig. 10: *The tombstone of George Wombwell with the lion Nero sleeping on the top of a sarcophagus (Image: Marie-Therese Mäder 2017).*

they are often not directly connected to the materiality of the cemetery and could also be told on another occasion at a different place. In this way the narratives enlarge the cemetery's geographical space with the life stories of the people buried there. These stories are complemented with personal stories of the tour guide. For example in front of the grave of a person who recently passed away, Alexander Walterowitsch Litwinenko, member of the KGB, he mentions: «...they put some radioactive stuff into his tea, uhm, a lot of people say, was he safely buried here? He is, because it was a substitute of Pollonium 210...»<sup>41</sup> The TG tells his personal story about an Arsenal football game he attended where they had to close a whole section of the football stadium. The deceased was at a game in the same stadium before he died and according to the TG they feared «some radioactive stuff» in this section. By sharing these personal stories the TG connects successfully with the Ps.

Finally the third type of epitexts refers to the Friends of Highgate Cemetery trust. The TG highlights several times how much the Friends have done to save the cemetery as in this case where he combines the topic of vandalism with the Friends engagement:

That door, remember I told you about vandalism, ... we didn't replace the door ... but we left this side [points to the destroyed part of the door], because this is what the vandals did, when they got in. They

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41 Mäder 2016, 15:1.



smashed the locker, they got in there, they smashed it, they slept in there, lit fires in there, awwww! You know these are crazy people, but that was before the actual Friends took over. So we don't know pretty much about the history. What we do know is that it has been badly vandalised. We are gonna move on folks!<sup>42</sup>

The structure of the story is similar to other occasions when the TG mentions the Friends trust in the context of vandalism. He explains how the place looked before it was restored. In front of the Beer mausoleum for example he explains how kids smashed the glass of the windows so that the pigeons flew in and out. «It was full of birdshit taller than me.»<sup>43</sup> Now the Beer mausoleum isn't open any more but the TG shows pictures from the inside and instructs people how to spy through the small windows even though you can't see the gold mosaic. The dramatic story of the mausoleum and how it has been destroyed and refurbished valorises the Friends engagement in the cemetery. Imagining how people scrubbed five feet of bird excrement out of the mausoleum seems quite a challenge and certainly demands some effort and even more dedication.

Personal and interactive moments qualify the category of epitexts. As already mentioned, these texts could also be communicated somewhere else than in the cemetery. The way the TG introduces and narrates these epitexts is often much more engaged and stirring than the presentation of the peritexts. One reason for this could be that the TG and his imagination was often more emotionally involved in these texts compared with the presentation of historical or technical facts.

#### *4. Public Events at Highgate as Socio-Religious Practice*

In the peritext and epitext of Highgate Cemetery many different cultural practices organised as group events are carried out. These social activities are thematically engaged with death in various ways during which acts of memory take place. These acts produce a «sticking power» emotionally and cognitively, to remember human finitude. Together they transform the uncontrollable dimension of death into a controllable sphere where it remains uncontrollable. Therefore the socio-cultural practices at Highgate also dispose of a religious dimension. Three aspects of socio-religious practices in the epitexts and peritexts of Highgate are particularly striking.

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42 Mäder 2016, 18:7.

43 Mäder 2016, 20:6.

The acts of memory carried out at Highgate contain a socio-religious dimension in the sense that Highgate Cemetery provides a space, in which the visitors can reflect on and are confronted with human finitude. It doesn't mean that all the visitors perceive it in this way but there is at least the possibility. Nevertheless it is conspicuous how few references to traditional religious worldviews or theological concepts are explicitly made during the tour. The few religious references be it «heaven» or «soul» are presented as a given fact, assumed to be known by everybody and are not further explained. What the difference is between a Christian and any other cemetery or what differentiates an Anglican from any other Christian burial space is never discussed.

Secondly there is a difference between public and private practices at Highgate. The public practices present a very temporal and less religious interpretation of the cemetery. Funerals, as more traditional religious practices, are exclusively peritexts and take place in private to pay respect to the relatives and friends of the deceased. On the one hand the guide tells a lot of life stories about the people buried at Highgate during the tours, what they achieved in life and what made them famous to the public. How they died, details about their funeral or why they are buried at this cemetery are seldom mentioned. I assume that many tour participants don't know how an Anglican interment is framed. Also the many art-historical and some more technical-practical-cultural references are often very fact oriented rather than interpretations of the cemetery. On the other hand the temporal-factual way the cemetery is presented leaves space for the participants' interpretations that will be as various as each of them is. They can weave in their own cultural background with its particular frame of knowledge, experience and emotional characteristics. The tour and the events can be used for their personal purposes and interests regarding death.

And finally the Friends of Highgate Cemetery trust are responsible for the cemetery becoming a social and accessible space again. Since the eighties people can visit it again to exchange knowledge and be informed about practices of death. Even though the Trust regulates and controls all activities very closely, they also care for the historic-religious site and maintain it to keep it viable for later generations. More generally said by maintaining the cemetery they also keep up the consciousness that there is a religious space. They use their privilege of access to decide which tombs are accessible for the public and will be restored and which aren't. Obviously their focus is on the historic Anglican burial ground. Therefore it can be said that a privileged group of people regulate and coordinate the access to

Highgate cemetery, its narrative, and interactions between epitexts and peritexts.

Through these different practices conducted in the paratexts of the cemetery it has become a new form of institutionalized place that maintains and provides a public space where visitors can cope with the contingent realm of death. As it has been pointed out traditional religiosity doesn't play a central role in the discussed paratexts. But the way in which the cemetery is presented and interpreted by various practices can still be understood as a temporal socio-religious practice to deal with the uncontrollable and inevitable fact of dying. Highgate and its paratexts transform the uncontrollable end of human life into a series of entertaining events. Death is loaded with meaning through secular practices without asking for any religious account or even a confession. Maybe it's not a full transformation into a controllable sphere but it at least provides a momentary distraction.

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# Highgate Cemetery at a Crossroads How to Take the Right Turn? A Contribution Based on the Economic Theory of Clubs

*Michael Leo Ulrich*

Highgate Cemetery is running out of space. If that problem is not solved in a satisfactory manner, the Cemetery might have to shut down its operations in the future. Trying to avoid such a scenario, in 2017, the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, the Cemetery's managing body, commissioned Alan Baxter Ltd., a London based consultancy firm, specialists in the design and conservation of urban spaces, to carry out a baseline study formulating the core questions related to that problem. Subsequently, from 22 July to 6 August 2017, the Trust organised an exhibition, which was also accessible online, providing a questionnaire aiming to fathom the visitors' opinions and standpoints regarding those delicate and difficult questions. In this chapter, those questions and the related issues will first be presented and analysed. Some of them, if not properly solved, have the potential to threaten the future existence of the Cemetery in its present form altogether. Furthermore, in its attempt to solve these issues, the Trust is faced with delicate issues in the sense that some of the obvious solutions to the problems related to one particular issue potentially aggravate other existing problems. Finding a satisfactory solution to all of the individual problems threatening the Cemetery's survival can be likened to a difficult balancing act. Second, based on James Buchanan's economic theory of clubs, this chapter aims to show, on the theoretical level, what a satisfactory solution to the various challenges faced by Highgate Cemetery looks like.<sup>1</sup> With the illustration of eight diagrams, it will be shown that the several variables, such as the number of daily visitors, the number of re-used graves, and the degree of vegetation trimming can be brought, pairwise, into an equilibrium, which maximises the Cemetery's stakeholders' benefit.<sup>2</sup> Diagrams are used because Buchanan's theory works with what is known in mathematics as the first derivative of a function, which can also be graphically repre-

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1 Buchanan 1965.

2 Stakeholders include future and present grave owners, visitors, mourners, and the bereaved.

sented by the slope of the function's graph. With the help of the first derivatives of the benefit and the cost functions, the point where net benefit is maximised (i.e., total benefit minus total cost), is identified. It will be shown, on the theoretical level, that a satisfactory solution to the Cemetery's problems is possible.

As mentioned above, the main issue the Trust faces is simply that the Cemetery is running out of space. In their draft of the Highgate Cemetery Options Report presented by Alan Baxter Ltd., which takes into account the information generated by the questionnaire-based survey, the authors write:

Space for new full burials is expected to run out within seven years (there are approx. 34 spaces on Cuttings Path in the West Cemetery and 90 spaces on the Mound in the East Cemetery). The most pressing issue for the Cemetery is how and where to provide new burial space [...].<sup>3</sup>

This problem is not specific to Highgate Cemetery. Especially in the London area, cemeteries are rapidly running out of burial space. In 2011, the BBC reported that «[a] recent audit of burial space by the Greater London Authority found eight boroughs were completely full, with no space for new burials. Another 10 boroughs have a «critical» problem, and are predicted to exhaust available space in 10 years.»<sup>4</sup> Six years later, a House of Commons briefing paper on the reuse of graves stated that «[i]n some areas there is now a scarcity of land available for burial and some burial grounds have closed because they are full. [...] The position is particularly acute in London.»<sup>5</sup> Highgate Cemetery's financial position is highly affected by that problem as «[t]he Cemetery receives no funding from Government and is reliant upon income from visitors and burials to maintain the Cemetery and keep it open.»<sup>6</sup> If the Cemetery were to run out of burial spaces, the trust would be faced with severe financial problems as the sale of a burial space generates considerable revenue. Whilst the cost of a burial in London is, on average, £3,806, George Michael's burial at Highgate Cemetery in 2017 cost £18,325, £16,475 for the plot and £1,850 for the dig-

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3 Evans/Hradsky 2017, 2.

4 Jones 2011.

5 Fairbairn 2017, 4.

6 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 1.

ging.<sup>7</sup> The cost for a burial place, however, can even be above £500,000, as one plot was sold for £550,000 in 2016.<sup>8</sup>

Another serious problem is the rampant growth of plants, scrubs and trees. The trust writes: «Tree roots, as well as falling trees and branches, are causing serious damage to monuments. The boundary between pleasing decay and dereliction is increasingly crossed.»<sup>9</sup> Highgate Cemetery was initially conceived as a garden Cemetery with a variety of landscapes offering «magnificent views towards then-distant London».<sup>10</sup> As the financial situation began to notably deteriorate after the 1940s, maintenance was scaled back, and due to the uncontrolled growth of trees, scrubs and ivy, all of the former splendid views have now been lost. Whilst this may have added to the charm and the reputation of the Cemetery as a place not only of benign decay but also of mystery and alleged vampire sightings, possibly attracting visitors, the out-of-control plant growth now seriously threatens to damage the Cemetery's graves and monuments.<sup>11</sup>

Another problem faced by the trust is to find the right balance between paying visitors and the preservation of the Cemetery's «unique atmosphere of romantic melancholy».<sup>12</sup> Both the famous people laid to rest at the Cemetery as well as its natural beauty, and the historic importance of the monuments within it, mirrored by the Cemetery's listing «at Grade I in Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens», led to a steady increase in the number of visitors.<sup>13</sup> The trust writes:

Although Highgate Cemetery does not advertise, visitor numbers are increasing year by year. In 2016, 60,000 people visited the East Cemetery and 25,000 took a guided tour of the West Cemetery. [...] Visitors and tours accounted for a vital 35% of the Cemetery's income.<sup>14</sup>

From a financial point of view, a continued increase in the number of visitors is desirable. However, the Cemetery's atmosphere, which is, in the words of the trust, «one of the finest and most atmospheric in the world», is likely to be negatively affected.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, especially if the number of

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7 Jones 2017.

8 Bartlett 2017.

9 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.

10 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.

11 Patient 2016.

12 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 6.

13 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.

14 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 8.

15 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 6.

visitors exceeds a certain limit, the privacy of those who are visiting graves, mourners and the bereaved, is infringed upon. This is a concern as the trust aims to keep Highgate Cemetery «a 'living' cemetery relevant to local people». <sup>16</sup> The attainment of that delicate balance between the preservation of the Cemetery's atmosphere and an increase in revenue generated by more visitors represents one of several issues the trust is faced with.

As mentioned above, following the exhibition addressing the pressing issues facing Highgate Cemetery and taking into consideration the results of the survey, Alan Baxter Ltd. presented a draft of possible actions that the trust might take to secure the Cemetery's future. <sup>17</sup> Regarding the imminent shortage of burial spaces, the draft's authors suggest the re-use of graves. The term «re-use» of graves is used according to the definition presented by the Cemeteries, Crematoria and Burials Provision (CCBP) Sub-Group of the London Environment Directors Network (LEDNET): «Re-use involves burial in graves previously used for burials (but at least 75 years previously), at depths where it may be necessary to disturb human remains». <sup>18</sup> Whilst the authors state that «[...]the re-use of graves] has been found to be acceptable in other cemeteries», they contend that «[a]t Highgate [...]the re-use is] made more complicated by the need to preserve the high significance of the site». <sup>19</sup> Here, the authors address two conflicting objectives in connection to a possible solution to the Cemetery's most pressing problem, the lack of burial space. If the re-use of graves is organised and carried-out with the sole objective to maximise the number of spaces available in the future, the Cemetery might have to give up its unique atmosphere, which constitutes, by itself, a financial asset as it appears to be obvious that the exceptionally high prices that are paid for a burial space at Highgate Cemetery are, in part at least, owed to the Cemetery's character of melancholic abandonment.

A field with perhaps less conflicting objectives is the Cemetery's encroaching vegetation. Uncontrolled growth of low-quality trees has begun to take its toll. The trust writes: «The balance has shifted from the romantic to the destructive, as self-seeded ash and sycamore have hidden the original landscape, destroying graves and monuments and obliterating long vistas.» <sup>20</sup> Furthermore, «[t]he landscape is slowly evolving into a succession

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16 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 4.

17 Evans/Hradsky 2017.

18 LEDNET 2013, 1.

19 Evans/Hradsky 2017, 2.

20 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.



woodland habitat».<sup>21</sup> It appears obvious that some action must be taken to preserve the Cemetery's character where the ensemble of nature and the deceased's resting place form that unique ensemble. «The juxtaposition of trees, ivy and graves gives the cemetery its unique atmosphere of sublime melancholy, which is treasured by grave owners and visitors.»<sup>22</sup> Obviously, that atmosphere would be lost if the Cemetery were to be restored to its original character as a «garden with clumps of trees and shrubs framing distant views of London».<sup>23</sup> In that sense, the trimming of the vegetation as an objective does, if not done in moderation and with great care, conflict with the preservation of the Cemetery's unique atmosphere.

That scenario with its delicate balance between differing objectives is now addressed through an approach based on the economic theory of clubs. When Buchanan presented his theory in 1965, he exemplified the theory's tenets with the example of a public swimming pool. In this chapter now, his theory is applied to Highgate Cemetery. With that theory it can be shown that there exist indeed stable partial equilibriae, that is, combinations of the variables in question, which maximise the Cemetery's stakeholders' (i.e., all involved parties, such as grave owner, visitors, and the bereaved) benefit. In the following, the current situation faced by the Cemetery's trust is scrutinised according to the tenets of that theory, and it will be shown that the attainment of multiple partial equilibriae, maximising stakeholders' benefit, is indeed possible. The attainment of a general equilibrium, however, will not be addressed, as that would lie beyond this chapter's scope. Prior to that, however, it is needed to introduce the term «club good» and how it relates to Highgate cemetery.

Economic theory differentiates between «private goods» and «public goods». The distinction rests on the two concepts of «rivalry of consumption» and «excludability». Rivalry of consumption means that consumption of a particular good, or service, by one consumer precludes consumption of that very good, or service, by another consumer. For example, if the re-use of graves were to be considered entirely inappropriate, then, a burial plot, once used, could not be used for another burial in the distant future. If the re-use, however, is considered acceptable after, say, fifty or one hundred years, one may speak of partial rivalry.<sup>24</sup> Of course, as long as there is sufficient space available, the problem of rivalry does not materialise and

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21 Evans/Hradsky 2017, 5.

22 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.

23 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.

24 Hindriks/Myles 2004 (2000), 172.

present itself; the burial of one person does not preclude the burial of another-one. However, if space is running out, rivalry of consumption becomes an issue and can only be avoided through the re-use of graves. Excludability then means, that a person can be excluded from the consumption of a certain good. For example, if a person A is unwilling to spend money on an admission ticket to visit Highgate Cemetery, that person will be excluded from visiting the site. A so-called private good is characterised by both, rivalry of consumption and excludability. A bottle of mineral water, which is sold to person A who intends to drink it all by him- or herself, cannot be consumed by person B. Moreover, the seller of mineral water bottles can exclude everyone who is not willing to pay the asking price from consumption.

A so-called public good, on the other hand, is characterised by the absence of both, rivalry of consumption and excludability. A good example of a public good is traffic regulation by government authorities. A pedestrian, waiting at a zebra crossing, who crosses the road when the light jumps to green, is not in rivalry with other pedestrians seeing the same green light, nor can anyone be excluded from crossing the street. A club good then is characterised by excludability and the absence of rivalry of consumption. For instance, a person who is not willing to pay the asking price for a burial space is excluded from the cemetery. And, if person A is buried in the cemetery, person B can still be buried in the same cemetery, provided there is sufficient space available. Similarly, whilst a person can be excluded from visiting the Cemetery if he or she is not willing to pay the entrance fee, there is no rivalry between person A's and person B's visit to the cemetery, they can both visit the cemetery simultaneously. In the following analysis then, the goods, and services offered by the Cemetery will be treated as club goods. With the help of the economic theory of clubs it will be shown that a) there exist, on the theoretical level, partial equilibriae between the number of re-used graves, the numbers of visitors admitted to the Cemetery, the number and quality of the facilities provided for visitors and mourners, as well as the degree to which the Cemetery's vegetation is trimmed and altered that optimises the benefit to grave-owners, visitors, and the bereaved, and that b) the attainment of such partial equilibriae is likely to safeguard the Cemetery's future. For the purpose of the analysis, a few assumptions are made. For example, it is assumed that the Cemetery's cost of maintenance has to be carried by visitors, new grave owners, or both. Donations and other sources of income are neglected. Furthermore, it is assumed that individual visitors, or new grave owners profit to an equal amount from a reduction in the cost. Furthermore, it is assumed that all individual visitors have an identical benefit curve. The same is assumed

regarding all of the individual new grave owners. Finally, existing grave owners are not included in that analysis as it is assumed that, having fully paid the price for their burial space, they cannot be made to contribute again to the Cemetery's maintenance cost.

To avoid formal mathematical notation, the theory's tenets are illustrated with the help of eight diagrams (fig. 1 to fig. 8). In figures 1 and 2, the behaviour of the total cost and the total benefit to the individual visitor is plotted as a function of the number of visitors to the Cemetery (fig. 1), and as a function of the number of re-used graves (fig. 2). In each diagram, the behaviour of cost and benefit is plotted for two given scenarios. For instance, in figure 1, in function of the number of paying visitors to the Cemetery, the two pairs (a dotted curve with a corresponding straight line as well as a solid curve with a corresponding straight line) illustrate the total benefit and total cost to the individual visitor for two scenarios: a) a scenario with the re-use of graves (dotted curve and dotted straight line) and b) a scenario with no re-use of graves (solid curve and solid straight line). Figure 3 then, drawing on the insights illustrated by figures 1 and 2, represents a partial equilibrium which, in light of the implied best combination of the two variables (number of visitors and number of re-used graves) maximises the individual visitor's net benefit. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the analogous case from the perspective of the individual new grave owner. Finally, figures 6 to 8 illustrate the attainment of a partial equilibrium through a balance between the degree of vegetation trimming and the number of visitors to the Cemetery.

In figure 1 below, as mentioned above, the pair consisting of the solid curve and the solid straight line represents the scenario with no new burials, that is, without the re-use of graves, and the pair consisting of the dotted curve and the dotted straight line represents the scenario with continued new burials, that is, with the constant re-use of graves. The solid cost line is situated above the dotted cost line because in case of no new future burials due to a lack of space, that source of income will close, and the Cemetery is likely to have to charge very high admission prices to visitors. The solid benefit curve is situated below the dotted benefit curve because in the absence of new burials, especially of famous people, the benefit to the individual visitor is likely to be considerably lower as a visit of the grave of a recently passed-on celebrity is likely to add to the individual visitor's benefit.

The arrow then shows, for the scenario with continued new burials, that is, in the case of a re-use of graves, the number of visitors which, regarding the individual visitor, generates the biggest net benefit, that is, the individual's total benefit minus total cost. The arrow is located where the slope of

the cost and the benefit curves are identical. To the left of that point, total benefit increases, or it decreases at a lower rate than total cost, and to the right of that point, total benefit decreases faster, that is, at a higher rate than total cost. Therefore, the arrow's position corresponds to the highest net benefit to the individual visitor. In the case of no new burials, the optimal number of visitors is zero simply because the price of an admission ticket exceeds, for all numbers of visitors, the benefit of a visit to the Cemetery.

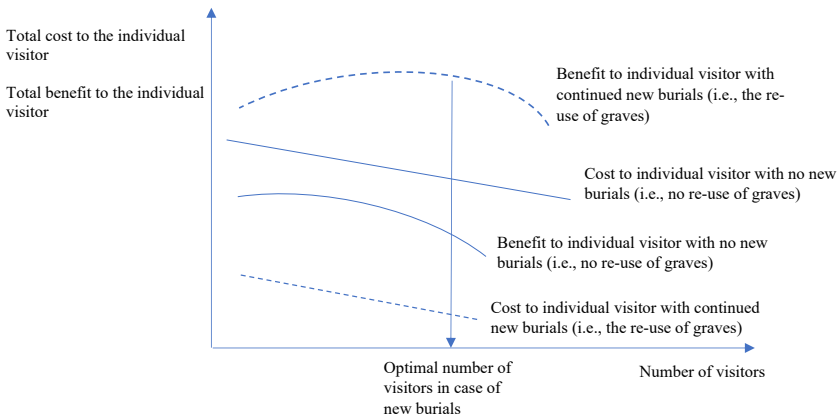


Fig. 1.

Figure 2 below illustrates the individual visitor's cost and benefit in function of the number of re-used graves. Two scenarios are shown: the solid benefit curve is above the dotted benefit curve simply because a large crowd of visitors might possibly compromise the individual's experience of the Cemetery's unique atmosphere of sublime melancholy. The two straight lines represent the cost to the individual visitor. Regarding the cost, the following assumptions are made. The solid straight line is positioned above the dotted straight line because with very few visitors only, that part of the cost of the Cemetery's maintenance, which is not paid for by new burials is shared by only a few visitors, and hence the cost to the individual visitor is substantial. It also has a steeper slope because in the case of a few visitors only, a reduction in the cost burdened on visitors, due to income generated by the re-use of graves, leads to a comparatively higher decrease in the cost per visitor than in the case of many visitors. However, due to the very small number of visitors, the cost to the individual

visitor is, for all numbers of re-used graves, above the benefit curve. Analogous to the scenario shown in figure 1, in the case of very few visitors only, the optimal number of re-used graves is therefore zero.

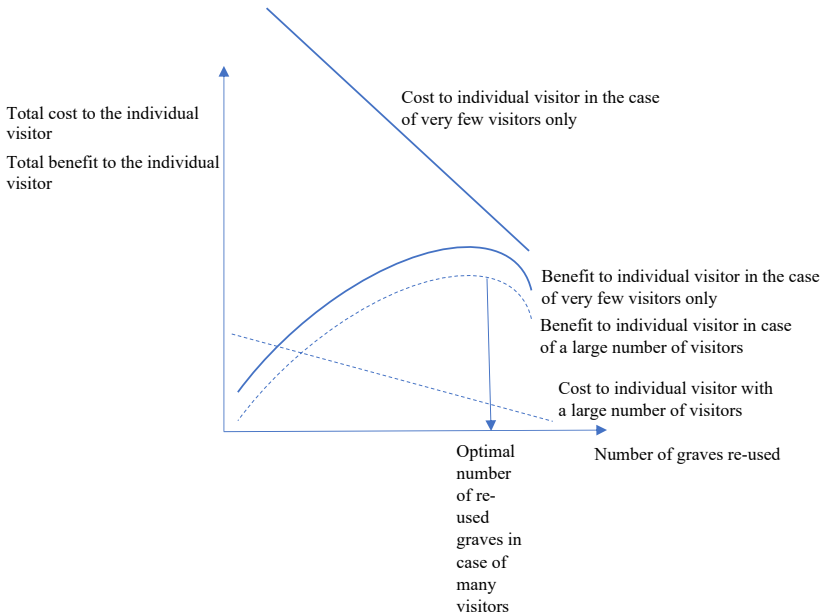


Fig. 2.

The circumstances and results of the two figures 1 and 2 can be merged and are represented in figure 3 (fig. 3). The straight line labelled «optimal number of visitors  $N_{opt}$ » determines the number of re-used graves that results in a visitor’s highest net benefit, and the straight line labelled «optimal number of graves re-used  $R_{opt}$ » determines the number of total visitors to the Cemetery that results in the individual visitor’s highest net benefit. Those two straight lines can be seen as reaction functions that lead to the achievement of a point of equilibrium. The logic underlying those two straight lines is derived from the two figures 1 and 2. In those two figures, it has been established that an increase in the number of visitors goes along with an increase in the number of re-used graves (and vice versa), if the individual visitor’s net benefit is to be maximised. Figure 3 then is read as follows: if, for example, the initial number of visitors corresponds to the amount indicated by point 1 on the abscissa, then the corresponding number of re-used graves is point 2 on the ordinate. That in turn leads to point

3, representing the corresponding number of visitors, leading to the highest net benefit of the individual visitor. In that way, equilibrium in point E is reached.

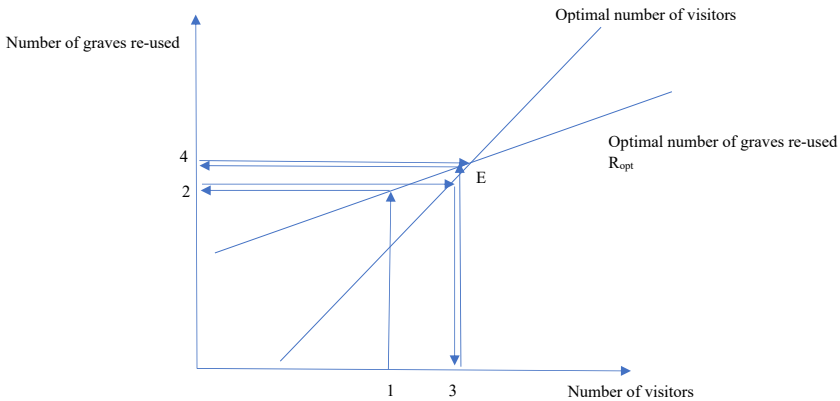
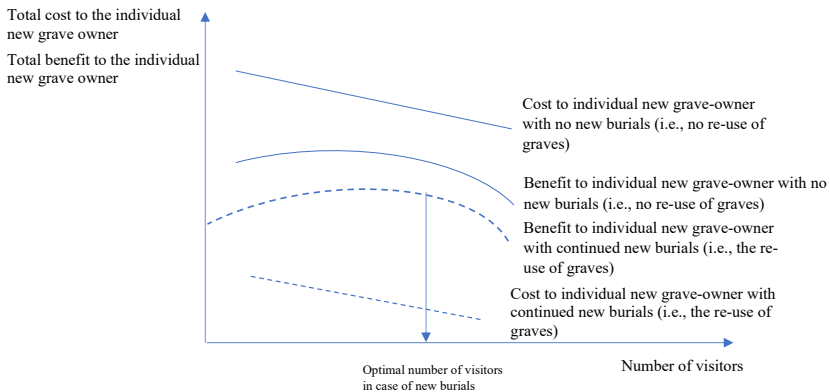


Fig. 3.

A point of equilibrium can also be achieved regarding the highest net benefit of the individual new grave owner. As illustrated in figure 4 below, a pairing of a solid curve and a solid straight line as well as a pairing of a dotted curve and a dotted straight line are shown (fig. 4). They represent, for the two scenarios indicated in the diagram, the total benefit and total cost to the individual new grave owner in function of the number of paying visitors to the Cemetery. The solid cost curve is situated above the dotted cost curve because in case of no new future burials due to a lack of space, that source of income will close, and the Cemetery is likely to have to sell the remaining burial spaces at a much higher price. Furthermore, in both scenarios, with and without new burials, an increase in the number of visitors leads to a decrease in the cost to the individual new grave owner simply because an increase in the number of visitors to the Cemetery and the corresponding generation of additional funds reduces the financial burden that has to be carried by new grave owners.

The dotted benefit curve then is situated above the solid benefit curve because, from the point of view of the grave owner, the certitude of being laid to rest in the vicinity of famous contemporary artists, business people and, or politicians is likely to be considered a benefit, otherwise, they are unlikely to have chosen Highgate Cemetery as their final resting place. Beyond a certain number of visitors, both benefit curves slope downward due

to overcrowding of the Cemetery. The arrow then shows the number of visitors which, regarding the individual new grave owner, generates the biggest net benefit, that is, the individual's total benefit minus total cost. In case of no new burials taking place, that number is zero as the cost to the individual new grave owner is, for all numbers of visitors, above the benefit.



*Fig. 4.*

In figure 5 below, the individual new grave owner's net benefit in function of the number of re-used graves is shown (fig. 5). The diagram illustrates two scenarios, one with few visitors only, the other one with many visitors. The cost to the individual new grave owner is clearly smaller in the case of many visitors, as the revenue generated by the sale of entry tickets carries a lot of the financial burden. And, analogous to figure 1 above, in the scenario with many visitors, new burial plots can be sold at a smaller price, and an increase in the number of re-used graves will therefore lead to only a comparatively small reduction in the cost to the individual new grave owner (compared to the scenario with few visitors only). As in all diagrams, for reasons of simplicity, the cost to the individual new grave owner is represented as a linear straight line. The benefit curve for the scenario of a large number of visitors is above the benefit curve of the scenario with few visitors only because it is assumed that a grave owner choosing Highbate Cemetery as his or her final resting place has, in part at least, made his or her decision based on the Cemetery's celebrity status which is commensurate to a large number of visitors. Both benefit curves turn downwards as

the number of re-used graves increases beyond a certain point as that would imply a loss of the Cemetery's character.

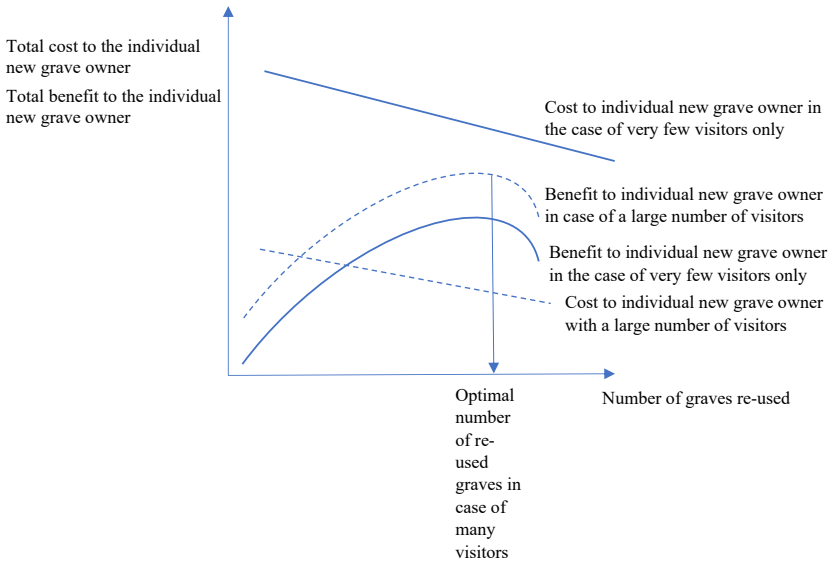


Fig. 5.

As shown in figure 5, the optimal number of re-used graves, which maximised the individual grave owner's benefit, in the case of only very few visitors, is zero. In the case of a large number of visitors, however, the cost to the individual visitor is substantially reduced, resulting in the identification of an optimal number of re-used graves ( $>0$ ). Therefore, analogous to the equilibrium shown in figure 3, a point of equilibrium in terms of a combination of the number of visitors and the number of re-used graves maximising the individual grave owner's benefit can be established, an equilibrium that maximises the individual grave owner's net benefit.

It is quite possible to enlarge this analysis by the inclusion of yet another variable, for example the degree to which the Cemetery's vegetation should be trimmed. A point of equilibrium, for example, between the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming, which maximises the individual visitor's benefit can be established.

The diagram below (fig. 6) illustrates the individual visitor's net benefit in function of the degree of vegetation trimming. Two scenarios are shown: the dotted benefit curve and the dotted straight cost line illustrate a



scenario with a large number of visitors, the solid curve and the solid straight line illustrate the scenario with few visitors only. Obviously, some vegetation trimming increases the individual visitor's benefit as he or she will now be able to enjoy some of the original spectacular vistas. Too much vegetation trimming, however, reduces the individual visitor's benefit as the Cemetery is bound to lose its character of melancholy decay. The solid benefit curve, illustrating the scenario with few visitors only, is above the dotted benefit curve simply because a large number of visitors is likely to spoil, to some degree at least, the individual visitor's experience of the Cemetery. The cost lines both have a positive slope as vegetation trimming will lead to higher prices of entry tickets; naturally, the fewer visitors, the bigger the price increase for the individual visitor. Therefore, the solid cost line has a steeper slope than the dotted-one.

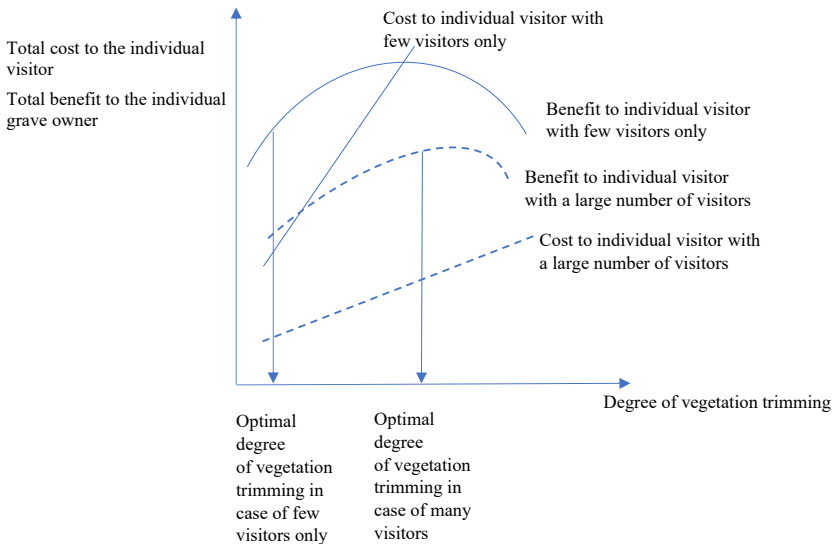


Fig. 6.

As in the two equilibria presented above, the relationship between the optimal degree of vegetation trimming and the number of visitors is of a complementary nature. The larger the number of visitors, the higher the degree of vegetation trimming that maximises the individual visitor's net benefit.

Figure 7 below illustrates the individual visitor's net benefit in function of the number of visitors in the case of a high and of a low degree of vegetation trimming. The benefit in the case of a high degree of vegetation trimming is above the benefit related to a low degree of vegetation trimming simply because the re-establishment of some of the initial spectacular vistas is likely to contribute positively to the individual visitor's benefit (fig. 7). The slope of the cost line, in case of a low degree of vegetation trimming, is negative as an increase in the number of visitors leads to a lower cost for the individual visitor, however, it is not as steep as the slope of the cost line for a high degree of vegetation trimming. The reason is straightforward. As in the case of a low degree of vegetation trimming, the absolute cost to the individual visitor is comparatively small, any reduction thereof due to an increase in the number of visitors is of course comparatively small also, resulting in only comparatively small reductions in cost due to additional visitors.

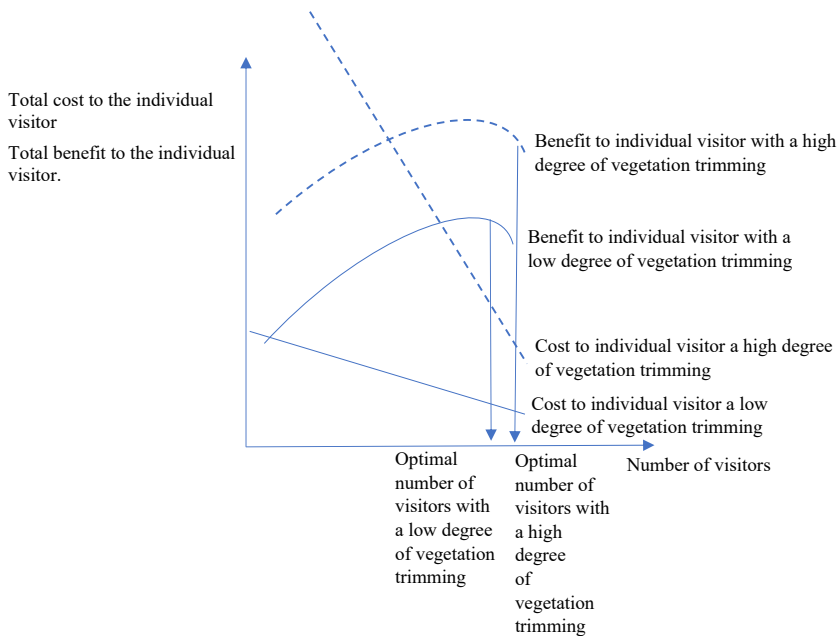


Fig. 7.

As in figure 6, the relationship between the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming that maximises the individual visitor's benefit

is of a complementary nature. Analogous to figure 3, figure 8 below illustrates the attainment of equilibrium, that is a combination of the degree of vegetation trimming and the optimal number of visitors, which maximises the individual visitor's benefit.

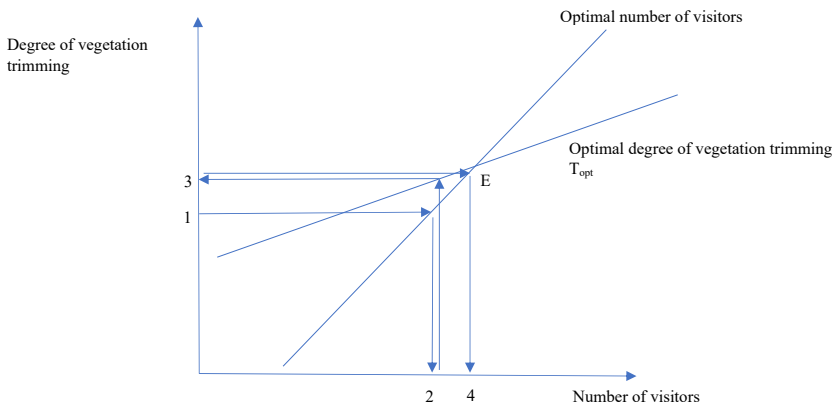


Fig. 8.

In the above diagram (fig. 8), representing the adjustment path leading to the combination of the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming that maximises the individual visitor's net benefit, the starting point is indicated by the point on the ordinate labelled «1». This then means that the corresponding best number of visitors is represented by the point on the abscissa labelled «2». However, if the number of visitors corresponds to point «2», then the best degree of vegetation trimming is represented by point «3». In that way, equilibrium is reached in point E.

Given the various variables addressed in the diagrams above, point E in diagram 8, as well as point E in diagram 3, only represent so-called partial equilibria. As mentioned above, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the attainment of an overall general equilibrium<sup>25</sup> including all relevant variables. The aim was to show, with the help of Buchanan's theory of economic clubs, that there exist indeed many partial equilibria, each identifying a specific combination of the two variables in question (for example, the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming in fig. 8), which maximises the Cemetery's individual stakeholder's (i.e. visi-

25 For a discussion of the general equilibrium see Cournot 2012 (1838); Daal/Jolink 2006 (1993); Marshall 2012 (1890).

tors, existing and future grave owners, as well as mourners) benefit. Those equilibria imply that all variables in question will have to be addressed by the Cemetery's Trust, such that at no time and nowhere should there be a solution imposed that favours one variable over all others. The middle ground, the balance between the many variables concerned must be found. If the Cemetery's Trust manages to find and maintain that delicate balancing point between the conservation of nature, the re-use of graves, and the number of visitors, the continued generation of a net benefit for its many stakeholders is highly likely to secure the Cemetery a well sustained future, as it is due to the generation of a high net benefit for its stakeholders that the Cemetery will be able to generate the funds needed to continue to operate.

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## IV. Fantastic Images





# Tales of the Dead

## Narrating Highgate Cemetery between Nostalgia and Heterotopia

Niels Penke

### 1. Introduction

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Highgate Cemetery has become a literary (as well as a filmic) trope with a variety of semantic inscriptions. Since its first literary representations, for instance as a symbol of wealth and high social status in John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* (1907–1921) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has grown to a multi-faceted place through the numerous references given to it in horror movies and mystery novels exploiting the decline of the cemetery, but also its criminal history.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it has become a setting for video games and cover-artworks of Gothic rock and Heavy metal-bands. Nonetheless, the most complex references to Highgate and its representations can be found in contemporary novels that concentrate on cemeteries, mostly with a retro-Victorian focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most popular of these novels Tracy Chevalier's *Falling Angels* (2001), Neil Gaiman's *Graveyard Book* (2008) and Audrey Niffenegger's *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009) reached a broad audience. These texts as well as many other representations of Highgate have highlighted the cemetery as a kind of a Gothic «heterotope» with a different (social, political, ontological) order in opposition to the «normal» world outside, as the French philosopher Michel Foucault described the cemetery in his theory of «other spaces».<sup>2</sup> This interrelation of the cemetery and the city, of «special» and «normal» spaces, is linked to the categorical differentiation between life and death, which is mediated through the cemetery as a liminal place of both, the borderland of the living and the 170,000 dead in their 53,000 graves.<sup>3</sup> Literature as a medium of imagination – and therefore, of any transgression possible – stresses these borders, and may expand them beyond reality

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1 See Anna-Katharina Höpflinger's contribution to this book.

2 For English translations of the text see Foucault 1986, or Foucault 1998.

3 See Bulmer 2016, 8.

and realistic story-telling towards alternative narrated worlds in Horror, Fantasy, or the in-between genre of the Phantastic.

The decline of Highgate in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century fuelled the literary imagination and sharpened the image of the dark Victorian past of forbidden love and hidden pleasures, ghosts and vampires that inhabit the cultural imagination up to the present day. In this article – after a short review of literary traditions concerning graveyard poetry and the narration of cemeteries – I will provide close-readings of the three above mentioned novels, whilst also reflecting upon how literary adaptations of cemeteries have changed against the backdrop of post-modern writing, and social reading. Social reading has gained much popularity since the year 2000 and the global social networks of the internet. Social reading has become a striking set of inter-acting practices of readers that blog and chat about the literature they read (for example on huge platforms such as *Goodreads*), which has a strong influence on both the reception of literary texts and also the perception of real spaces and encounters that are antecedent to the literary adaptations.

## 2. *Literary Traditions: Epitaphs and Graveyard Poetry*

From the earliest stages of literature, graves and graveyards have been used as literary motifs that became *tropes*, metaphors with a fixed or conventional signification. In Greek and Latin literature, myriads of epitaphs and other forms of epigrammatic writings used in burial contexts are known.<sup>4</sup> They have been transmitted and translated continually throughout the centuries in their dual functions to remember the dead and to remind the living of their mortality (*memento mori*). It was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the cemetery became a principal aspect in literature. With the graveyard poetry cemeteries became popular through the so-called pre-romantic «Graveyard School».<sup>5</sup> Thomas Parnell's *A Night-Piece on Death* (1721) was the first poem to let a voice speak, that was situated in a graveyard. Parnell evokes a graveyard of «The Marble Tombs that rise on high» in order to memorialize the living: «They rise in visionary Clouds / And all with sober

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4 See Wolfe 2013 and Liddel/Low 2013.

5 There are some forebears in the 17<sup>th</sup> century such as Edward, Lord of Cherbury (*Elegy Over A Tomb*, 1617) or George Herbert (*Sepulchre*, 1633), but they did not attract the same attention as the 18<sup>th</sup> century graveyard poets did.

Accent cry / *Think, Mortal, what it is to dye.*»<sup>6</sup> *Memento mori* is the striking intention of Parnell's poem, that is also present in his successors' writings.

Most notable among the graveyard poems are Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), Edward Young's *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–1745) and Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1750) which all fuelled a literary trend that paved the way for the Gothic Novel and other genres closely related to the dark and the uncanny. But these literary tropes were mostly self-referential, in that they only connected to literary depictions. Thus, the graveyards in graveyard poetry didn't have any close connection to real places. Instead, they portrayed the gloomy graveyard in general as the ideal setting for meditation and melancholic reflections on death and loss,<sup>7</sup> immortality and afterlife, and any other kind of religious and philosophical speculation.<sup>8</sup> Their settings are gloomy, but they also convey to the reader impressions of cozy, almost homely places. Graveyard poets, as Eric Parisot put it, «collectively, [...] revived a literary tradition that viewed death as a friend and a blessing, one that extended well into modernity.»<sup>9</sup>

About a hundred years later, the Irish poet William Allingham (1824–1889), wrote a piece entitled *In Highgate Cemetery*, serving the tradition of Graveyard poetry with an explicit reference to a concrete place.

Far-spread below doth London wear  
Its cloud by day, its fire by night--  
Yet scarce with heavenly presence there  
Shrined in the smoke or pallid light.

Incessant troops from that vast throng  
Withdraw to silent colonies;  
Where houses, lo, are fair and strong,  
Though ruins, all that dwell in these.

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6 Parnell 1989, 168–171.

7 For an analysis of how the reflection on death in graveyard poetry influenced literature and society see Smith 2016.

8 See Leeuwen 2009. For a comparative view see Akhavan 2015.

9 Parisot 2013, 159.

Yet, 'neath the universal sky,  
Bright children here too run and sing,  
Calm verdure waxes green and high,  
And grave-side roses smell of Spring.<sup>10</sup>

The voice is located within the cemetery, among the grave sites, looking down on the vivid city – Highgate is the <other> space, yet no trace of horrifying aspects can be found in Allingham's poem.

### 3. *Shaping Highgate: Horror and Glory*

Highgate did not become the mysterious place it now represents in literature without the mystifications of popular culture. When John Galsworthy wrote his three novels and two novellas which were compiled to produce *The Forsyte Saga* (1907–1921), Highgate was a continuous setting for the family member's burials, yet hardly any hint of a darkened place with ghosts and walking dead can be detected in his stories. Subsequent history has contributed to shape the darker aspects of Highgate as <Victorian Valhalla> (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: *Victorian Valhalla* (Image: Niels Penke 2017).

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10 Allingham 1850, 8.

Central to its change of image was the decline of Highgate Cemetery after its closure following the Second World War and rumours of occult rites occurring there. The presumed Highgate vampire in the late 1960s and early 1970s paved the way for new representations in media and popular culture. Most notably, Hammer production's *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970) starring Christopher Lee shaped the cultural notion of Highgate as a place of the uncanny, which was prolonged with other horror movies such as *Tales from the Crypt* (1972) and *From Beyond the Grave* (1974) marking the peak of darkening the cemetery.<sup>11</sup>

With this in mind, as a kind of cultural knowledge, one might better understand the close connection between Highgate and ghosts, vampires and other dark secrets, which are featured so often when it becomes the setting of stories and novels. In such a guise it appears as a suitable stage for some successful contemporary novels in the genre of Gothic fiction (or maybe retro-Gothic, as they revive older forms of the novel with an emphasis on reviving its gloomy aesthetics).

Most notable are Anne Perry's *Highgate Rise* (1991), Tracy Chevalier's *Falling Angels* (2001), Fred Vargas' *Une Lieu Incertain* (2008; *An Uncertain Place*), Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008), Audrey Niffenegger's *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009) and Victoria Álvarez' *Hojas de Dedalera* (2011, not translated into English yet).<sup>12</sup> All these novels focus on the darker aspects of Highgate and its history alongside their many references to elements of classical Gothic literature as a model-kit of motifs and scenes in order to create a particular atmosphere. Some, as historical novels, also go back in time to the Victorian age of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Perry; Chevalier; Álvarez) to intensify the gloomy atmospheres against the background of a period that was closely related to a mourning culture in society as a whole. Moreover, all the Highgate-novels contain some twists; they evoke the cemetery not only as the Gothic trope to raise a certain uncanny atmosphere, but also as a liminal space, where the veil between life and death is thin, and in some cases, even permeable. In the following section I will provide close readings of three novels whose appropriations of the stock of images of Highgate as well as of literary traditions appear to be the most interesting, and influential when it comes to literary tourism in the context of social reading.

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11 See Höpflinger's contribution in this volume.

12 This is nothing but a brief selection. One may find many more crime, horror or mystery tales, especially from the last decades. Most recently: Vaughn Entwistle *The Angel of Highgate* (2012), Asa Bailey *The Vampire of Highgate* (2012) and Della Farrant *Haunted Highgate* (2014).

#### 4. Highgate in Literature between Nostalgia & Heterotopia

The first of these novels, Tracy Chevalier's (\*1962) *Falling Angels* dates back to the 1990s, when Chevalier encountered Highgate Cemetery through a guided tour. She remembers: «I fell in love with the decay, the gothic excess, the neglect. More than that: as the guide pointed out yet another symbol of death adorning a grave (it was an hourglass with wings – time flies, all is temporary), I thought, I have got to set a book here. What kind of society was this that celebrated death so explicitly?»<sup>13</sup> After she made the plan to write this novel, she started volunteering at the cemetery to professionalize this particular aspect of her writing, not only in order to achieve a professional expertise of Highgate's history and its conditions, but also to familiarize herself with its atmosphere.

The novel starts in January 1901, on the day after Queen Victoria's death as told in the second chapter of the multiperspectivic narration (which means every chapter is told by another character with a unique voice). On account of this event, two families visit the cemetery, where they own neighboring graves. Their communication starts with a quarrel over the gravesite decoration, where one family, the Waterhouses, chose an angel, while the other, the Colemans, an urn. Developing out of this constellation of images, Chevalier portrays two different attitudes towards society, contrasting Victorian traditionalism (as shown in the angel) (fig. 2) with a more progressive modernism (as the urn is a sign for cremation), although their argument is strictly connected to and conducted in the cemetery.

As the plot develops, the families are linked to each other when their little daughters Maude and Lavinia become friends while using the cemetery as their mutually favourite playground – they confess to be «desperate to get to the cemetery». <sup>14</sup> As a result of this they get to know the people working there and also make friends with the gravedigger's son, Simon, who already works with his father. He helps the girls to get a deeper access to and understanding of the cemetery. Highgate becomes a space of transgression, where some borders are, at least temporarily, permeable. The cemetery appears as a point of intersection; it is shown as a historical monument and representation of economic and social status, but furthermore as a place of social interaction, and labour. This plethora of meanings irradiates in different practices of handling the cemetery. While the gravediggers dig without further involvement, the protagonists visit their family's graves, and

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13 Chevalier, n.d.

14 Chevalier, 2001, 53.



*Fig. 2: Highgate Angel (Image: Niels Penke 2017).*

discuss aesthetics, finally, they also research burial and mourning practices. By doing so, they respond to the ‹Zeitgeist›, which is supported by the upper social classes. «But really if they want to go there, we have Queen Victoria to blame for it, elevating mourning to such ridiculous heights that girls with romantic notions grow drunk from it.»<sup>15</sup> When the girls experience the other's behaviour in the cemetery and whilst talking about it, we as readers experience a broad variety of practical and mental relations towards cemeteries, and negotiating death and loss. The children's playful attitude is, in accordance with their social status, quite opposite to the gravediggers' needs, and the manager's relation, who runs the cemetery like a warehouse or a factory «A cemetery is a business, like any other,»

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15 Chevalier 2001, 114.

Mr. Jackson [the manager] says. «People tend to forget that.»<sup>16</sup> But with the grave-digging boy, Simon, they get to know places, such as the «heathenish» columbarium and the Circle of Lebanon, where Chevalier offers close descriptions.

The columbarium is housed in one of the vaults in the Circle of Lebanon, where a sort of channel has been dug round a big Lebanon cedar and lined with a double row of family vaults. To get to it one walks up the Egyptian Avenue, a gloomy row of vaults overhung with rhododendrons, the entrance done in the Egyptian style, with elaborate columns decorated with lotus flowers. The whole thing is rather theatrical – I am sure it was very stylish back in the 1840s, and now it makes me want to laugh. The tree is lovely, at least, its branches crooked and almost horizontally spread, like an umbrella of blue-green needles. With the blue sky behind it like today it can make the heart soar.<sup>17</sup>

Not only is the cemetery the cardinal point of all the protagonists' important interactions, it is also crucial for the condition of their inner life. By this, it becomes clear that it is primarily the living that rule this place. «I've often thought this place is really for the living, not the dead. We design the grave to remind us of the dead, and of what we remember of them.»<sup>18</sup> Thus, Highgate is very present in precise descriptions that allow the reader to follow the character's tours around the cemetery, «our lives seem to revolve around it»<sup>19</sup>, as Lavinia sums up all their relations.

When Simon one day gets trapped in a grave, they experience the gloomy atmosphere of Highgate. Even though sinister moments are rare in Chevalier's novel, they appear. Another day, the angel on the Waterhouses' grave falls down.<sup>20</sup> This is, on the level of diegesis, to be understood as a supernatural sign of fate, pointing to the impending doom of the family. But, as the novel definitely tends toward realism without any undecidable tension whether there might be some supernatural forces in the shadows, these suspicious moments come to a resolution in the end without any super-human powers entangled here. In fact, the *Falling Angel* is, on the symbolic level, a clear mark of the crack of ages and the farewell to the old Victorian age, whose haunting shade of mourning is to be cleared away by his-

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16 Chevalier 2001, 102.

17 Chevalier 2001, 84.

18 Chevalier 2001, 335.

19 Chevalier 2001, 395.

20 Chevalier 2001, 129.



torical progress.<sup>21</sup> As the girls grow up, the Victorian century gets detached by new inventions, as electricity replaces gas lighting and the Edwardian age, the «new age»<sup>22</sup> breaks through, even when Halley's Comet appears in 1910 – the cemetery stays as it was. When the protagonists change and some of them vanish, Highgate Cemetery remains forever as a playground, a garden and the memorial site for those that live nearby.

Without a concrete link to Chevalier's novel, Audrey Niffenegger's (\*1963) *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009) seems to shift the plot about a hundred years later. The twins Julia and Valentina move to London, when their presumed aunt Elspeth dies and bequeaths them her apartment (under the fictitious address Vautravers Mews, Highgate, N6), if they meet the precondition to stay for at least a year. The house is directly bordering the cemetery: «Beyond the wall, Highgate Cemetery spread before them, vast and chaotic. Because they were on a hill, they might have seen quite far down into the cemetery, but the density of the trees prevented this.»<sup>23</sup> Elspeth's former companion Robert, sunk in depression and grief, works as a guide at the cemetery. He also, as a historian, writes his doctoral thesis on the history of Highgate. Therefore, he owns a key to the cemetery enabling visits whenever that is required. The third chapter initiates the cemetery with Elspeth's burial and a precise location of her grave site:

The hearse glided up the Cuttings Path and disappeared from sight. The Noblin mausoleum was just past Comforts Corners, near the middle of the cemetery; the mourners would walk up the narrow, tree-root-riddled Colonnade Path and meet the hearse there. People parked their cars in front of the semicircular Colonnade, which divided the courtyard from the cemetery, extricated themselves and stood looking about, taking in the chapels (once famously described as Undertakers Gothic), the iron gates, the War Memorial, the statue of Fortune staring blank-eyed under the pewter sky. Marijke [one of their neighbors] thought of all the funerals that had passed through the gates of Highgate. The Victorians black carriages pulled by ostrich-plumed horses, with professional mourners and inexpressive mutes, had given way to this motley collection of autos, umbrellas and subdued friends. Mari-

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21 On angel statues at Highgate Cemetery see also the contribution of Natalie Fritz in this volume.

22 Chevalier 2001, 98.

23 Niffenegger 2009a, 79.

like suddenly saw the cemetery as an old theatre: the same play was still running, but the costumes and hairstyles had been updated.<sup>24</sup>

Niffenegger's novel opens up the perspective of a historical connection back to the Victorian age with Highgate as the stage of «an old theatre» giving the same play throughout the centuries while changes only occur on the surface.<sup>25</sup> How history is still entangled with the present is shown in several of the tours that Robert and Jessica, Robert's boss, lead. From Strathcona to Mount Royal memorial, down Swains Lane memorializing people and their lives. The highlight of these tours is told in a whole chapter of more than 15 pages, *A Tour of Highgate Cemetery*. In there, the twins experience an in-depth introduction to the cemetery, its emergence and its most prominent figures and stories, and become attracted to it. Niffenegger does as Chevalier did when she also connects every character with a peculiar relation to the cemetery. Highgate is mainly seen through the eyes of the few main characters – thus, it appears as a closed world apart from other people with hardly any interaction outside. «For Jessica, Highgate was not about the tours, or the monuments, not about the supernatural or the atmosphere or the morbid peculiarities of the Victorians; for her the cemetery was about the dead and their grave-owners.»<sup>26</sup> Thus, she protects the cemetery, as it had «suffered from the attentions of paranormalists and Satanists in the past», she «spent a great deal of time discouraging Japanese television programmes and enthusiasts of the supernatural from promoting Highgate as a sort of haunted cemetery Disneyland.»<sup>27</sup> Robert's relation is more diverse, besides his scholarly interest in the cemetery, he is also emotionally involved. «He found that he liked the cemetery itself much better than anything he wrote about it.»<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, in the chapter *Night in Highgate Cemetery*: «He liked Highgate Cemetery best at night. At night there were no visitors, no weeds to pull, no enquiries from journalists there was only the cemetery itself, spread out in the moonlight like a soft grey hallucination, a stony wilderness of Victorian melancholy.»<sup>29</sup> Robert also pretends to patrol in order to protect the cemetery against

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24 Niffenegger 2009a, 10.

25 Niffenegger 2009a, 10.

26 Niffenegger 2009a, 27.

27 Niffenegger 2009a, 60.

28 Niffenegger 2009a, 27.

29 Niffenegger 2009a, 51–52.

«vandals and the self-described vampire hunters.»<sup>30</sup> Robert is the key-figure for Niffenegger's staging of the cemetery, as his:

PhD thesis had begun as a work of history: he imagined the cemetery as a prism through which he could view Victorian society at its most sensationally, splendidly, irrationally excessive; in their conflation of hygienic reform and status-conscious innovation, the Victorians had created Highgate Cemetery as a theatre of mourning, a stage set of eternal repose. But as he did the research Robert was seduced by the personalities of the people buried in the cemetery, and his thesis began to veer into biography; he got sidetracked by anecdote, fell in love with the futility of elaborate preparations for an afterlife that seemed, at best, unlikely. He began to take the cemetery personally and lost all perspective. He often sat with Michael Faraday, the famous scientist; Eliza Barrow, who had been a victim of the notorious serial murderer Frederick Seddon [...].<sup>31</sup>

Through historic and biographical insights like this, Niffenegger's Highgate gets a far more precise description than in Chevalier's novel, especially the focus on famous buried persons and their gravesites, such as Karl Marx, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, who was exhumed for the poems Rossetti consigned with her at her burial. By doing so, *Her Fearful Symmetry* starts as a realistic novel, but after a while supernatural elements begin to creep in. It starts with telekinesis and ghostly apparitions, that get enlightened in the process of the novel. It turns out that the deceased Elspeth refuses to leave the world. She, strong-willed even in death, finds she is stuck in the world of the living and therefore haunting her own flat, unable to escape. By this exposure of the supernatural, Highgate is highlighted as a place of intercourse of the living and the dead – and Elspeth's house fulfills the trope of the house at the cemetery from horror film tradition (as initially depicted in Lucio Fulci's infamous *The House by the Cemetery* from 1981). She seeks to come back in the flesh, which is successful in the end when she's able to take the body of one of the twins who is suicidal. The ghost story is transferred back to normal while all the protagonists except Elspeth flee the eerie house at Highgate. «On Roberts desk was a neat pile of paper. A History of Highgate Cemetery. All the files and notes had been cleared away. There was a look of finality about the scene.»<sup>32</sup>

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30 Niffenegger 2009a, 52.

31 Niffenegger 2009a, 58.

32 Niffenegger 2009a, 401.

Despite its supernatural and fantastic elements, the depictions of Highgate in Niffenegger's novel are nonetheless close to its real model for Niffenegger (\*1963) also volunteered at the cemetery after two years of research for the novel. She has been guiding tours since 2004, and still does so from time to time.<sup>33</sup>

One of these tours was visited by Neil Gaiman (\*1960), a popular comic, horror and fantasy writer from England who had just moved to the US. In an interview Gaiman admitted that Highgate inspired him especially because of Niffenegger as his guide.<sup>34</sup> He had already made a plan to write a graveyard novel back in 1985, but decided it wasn't the right time to get it done until he encountered Highgate through Niffenegger. The Western part of Highgate (supplemented with Abney Park cemetery, a Sussex graveyard and Glasgow Necropolis) helped him to shape the main setting for his *Graveyard Book* (2008). His novel is a rather rare attempt to pen a graveyard story mainly written for children. The novel does, nonetheless, remain partially dark and scary. When his parents are murdered, the baby-boy Bod flees his home, and finds shelter in the cemetery close by. A look at the first chapter *When Bod entered the graveyard* shows a typical place of horror:

The fog was thinner as you approached the top of the hill. The half-moon shone, not as bright as day, not by any means, but enough to see the graveyard, enough for that. Look. You could see the abandoned funeral chapel, iron doors padlocked, ivy on the sides of the spire, a small tree growing out of the guttering at roof level. You could see stones and tombs and vaults and memorial plaques. You could see the occasional dash or scuttle of a rabbit or a vole or a weasel as it slipped out of the undergrowth and across the path. You would have seen these things, in the moonlight, if you had been there that night. [...] The gates were locked. They were always locked at four in the afternoon in winter, at eight at night in summer. Spike-topped iron railings ran around part of the cemetery, a high brick wall around the rest of it. The bars of the gates were closely spaced: they would have stopped a grown man from getting through.<sup>35</sup>

Gaiman's cemetery is vaguely described, even if it contains some topological and topographical details, it could be anywhere. In contrast to his pop-

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33 Niffenegger, 2009b.

34 See Jones, 2017.

35 Gaiman 2008.

ular novel *American Gods*, *The Graveyard Book* is not about to reproduce real places and their conditions. Hence, Gaiman's focus lies somewhere else, exactly in the creation of a cemetery in strict opposition to the real world and its social inscriptions: as a heterotopian place of colour and diversity in the sense of Michel Foucault that is a refuge for the boy in distress, where the magical assemblage of otherwise contradictory forces is possible.<sup>36</sup> Gaiman's novel is directed to a children's literature audience, though he draws many motifs from Gothic horror traditions. But many twists arise as most of the grim and scary creatures that inhabit his graveyard are more friendly and adjuvant to the boy than any of the living ever were. According to this, his cemetery is a lovely place of calmness, safety and beauty that are derived from models such as Abney Park and Highgate – as a model that moreover had its own vampire.<sup>37</sup>

If the novels are compared to each other, what do they have in common? First of all, they tend toward nostalgic approaches to their subject concerning the times when cemeteries were more central places of society, and culture. The three authors produce stories that express a longing for the sublime, and at least two of them also for magic and the supernatural. By doing this, they confirm Max Weber's hypothesis that even in the epoch of disenchantment, the «world remains a great enchanted garden».<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, this «magic» is no longer linked to any transcendental religious truth, it only refers to the individual experience in the act of reading (as well as in the attendance of Highgate), and the imaginations inspired thereof. In supernatural fiction like this, Highgate works as a place that «guarantees» more than other places – in the sense of Foucault as a heterotopia – a different order. The cemetery seems to make it more conceivable, that the marvelous intrudes reality, or at least, that there might be a place of in-between-ness, of transgressions between life and death. Indeed, their main common quality is – besides the «good story» and gloomy atmospheres – the evocation of bygone times and its representatives. In that regard, the cemetery is a medium; it connects the particular time of the conscious visitor, writer or reader with former times: with pre-Christian antiquity and the Middle-Ages as Gaiman's story does, with Victorian and Edwardian times in Chevalier's case, with the general history of Highgate and some of its inhabitants in Niffenegger's novel. Wherever you want to look back to, the cemetery is most likely to offer a suitable connection, especial-

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36 See Penke 2012a; and Penke 2012b.

37 See Rasmussen 2014.

38 Weber 1971 (1920), 270.

ly if its gravesites don't get removed as it is the case with the eternal places of the «Victorian Valhalla». The different historical layers of the past are still present – side by side in the same «broad present»,<sup>39</sup> they offer passages to different pasts, as a source for extensive narrations, for tales of the dead, and their residence.

All three novels are under the influence of the real place Highgate Cemetery, so it might be an appropriate question to ask in the other direction: what does literature add to reality, or at least, how does it fuel the imagination of the readers that later on experience Highgate as visitors?

### 5. (*Literary*) *Tourism and Social Reading*

Social reading is not a new phenomenon in literature or literary studies, but it has gained much attention as it has been fueled through digitalization and many recent opportunities in blogs and social-media platforms.<sup>40</sup> Social reading features a set of practices, such as sharing one's experiences, feelings and thoughts while or after reading a book, discussing with others, writing reviews, giving hints and further suggestions. In the latter part, the real world overlaps with fiction, for example when advice relating to touristic outings are given. Highgate at least is worth a real visit, as we can read in some reviews written for *Goodreads*.<sup>41</sup> Some readers experience the cemetery first, but as far as my observation goes, most of the reviewers at *Goodreads* and other platforms are convinced to visit it *while* or *after* reading. They are persuaded by the authors and their novels. «I was as enchanted with this book as I was with the cemetery. Both gave me chills.»<sup>42</sup> writes a reviewer D. on 03.03.2008 on Chevalier's *Falling Angels*. C. adds on 26.05.2013 «I toured it 2 years ago and it was one of the most richly rewarding places I've ever been. Perhaps that made the book even more spectacular.» This conserving tendency of Chevalier's depiction of Highgate is a quality that many readers seem to attach to the novel, while others that live(d) «nearby» show a greater awareness of the author's creativity «I say

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39 See Gumbrecht, 2014.

40 See Cordón-García/Alonso-Arévalo/Gómez-Díaz/Linder 2013, esp. 141–191. Further: Peplow 2016.

41 The full range of reviews of the books in focus can be found via: <https://www.goodreads.com/search?q=Highgate> (accessed May 20, 2018).

42 All the quotes from reviews can be accessed in the Goodreads review-section, see: [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2872.Falling\\_Angels?ac=1&from\\_search=true#other\\_reviews](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2872.Falling_Angels?ac=1&from_search=true#other_reviews) (accessed May 26, 2018).

loosely because having been to Highgate. I recognize where some of the landmarks have had author's licence done with them» (M.D. on 24.09.2016). Nonetheless, the novel draws attention to the real cemetery and attracts visitors as can even be detected in reviews for the travel portal *Trip Advisor* «I've wanted to visit Highgate Cemetery since reading *Falling Angels*»,<sup>43</sup> a visitor starts her five star-report, that confesses overwhelming experiences.

Whereas Chevalier's novel (1,307 reviews in total) didn't attract that many visitors, the readers seem to prefer Audrey Niffenegger's *Her fearful symmetry* (11,936 reviews in total), not only at *Goodreads* but in other self-descriptions as a whole book-club wrote in a report.<sup>44</sup> The visitors' reactions range from reinforcing the reading-impressions («I think having been to the Cemetery and knowing London made a big difference. I could really visualise the places and atmosphere as I read it»; N. on 27.09.2009) to fueling a desire to visit («and you will want to, too, after reading this»; G.W. 28.05.2012) culminating in the fulfilment of that desire «[b]est part of book was it caused me to visit Highgate» (D. on 26.11.2014). Several reviewers confess they liked the cemetery better than the novel: «The only thing I really liked about this book was its description of Highgate and its surroundings, especially Highgate Cemetery. Skip this book. Go to a Highgate Cemetery tour next time you're in London» (R.B. 29.05.2016). As far as the likes and comments to these reviews show, Niffenegger's novel is a medium that raises attraction for Highgate even though not all readers enjoy it. Their experiences focus on the condensed history in the western part, and the peculiar atmosphere in general, in which the supernatural elements of *Her fearful symmetry* seem to spoil the gravity of the original place. When visiting the cemetery, visitors seem to search for peculiar atmospheres that literature (or movies) have promised. Retracing these paths reveals an aim to reproduce meaning, whether it be by immersion into the fictitious inscriptions of the novels, or by the longing for a glimpse of the «supernatural» itself.

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43 See [https://www.tripadvisor.de/ShowUserReviews-g186338-d194290-r386232703-Highgate\\_Cemetery-London\\_England.html](https://www.tripadvisor.de/ShowUserReviews-g186338-d194290-r386232703-Highgate_Cemetery-London_England.html) (accessed May 26, 2018).

44 See <http://wiflyers.org/2017/06/highgate-cemetery-book-club-visit/> (accessed May 27, 2018).

## 6. Conclusion

According to a general broadening of the cultural semantics of the cemetery from graveyard poetry to horror, more open, partially heterotopian, partially nostalgic as well as supernatural notions can be ascertained. As the motif of the cemetery as a «threshold» is widely-used in horror and fantasy literature, and also film, it influences even realistic novels and their readers. What all the explored novels (and also those of Anne Perry, Barbara Hambly and others) share, is a fundamental shift in the common ground of the religious implications: whereas the graveyard poets pondered about the soul, its afterlife and resurrection, these questions only appear in the mode of secularistic realism (with an implied neglect), or the mode of the supernatural (as ostentatious inauthenticity). On the contrary, all novels emphasize the maintenance of bygone times and the deceased. This pluralism of different kinds of post-mortem existence (as images and literary figures) goes without salvation for the dead, but for the living. Their contributions to the communicative memory help to keep the past alive: as long as there is talking, writing and reading, the dead won't be forgotten completely. However, this preservation needs the real model, the authentic Highgate Cemetery – as long as the place and its components exist, the past stays alive – by visiting, and narrating, and vice versa.

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# A Top-Hat, a Mad Murderess, a Vampire King Practices, Imaginations, and the Materiality of Haunted Highgate

*Anna-Katharina Höpflinger*

If you like ghosts and love vampires, you should perhaps try Highgate Cemetery in London. Especially around midnight on a full moon – but sometimes even during the daytime – the chances of seeing a spirit there are not too bad; at least that’s what some people believe. Highgate Cemetery gained a significant level of notoriety, especially during the 1950s to the 1980s, as one of Britain’s most haunted places: a ghoul with flaming eyes, a ghost-cyclist, a tall figure in a black coat and a top-hat, an elderly mad murderess, the so called Spring-Heeled Jack, a vampire, and a shrouded dark figure are but a few of the supernatural beings connected with this cemetery.<sup>1</sup> During this time the cemetery was abandoned, a potentially significant factor in fuelling such stories, as I will argue. A particular peak in sightings occurred in the late 1960s fanned-by popular media and the influence of horror-films.

In this study I will analyse the connection between the graveyard as a material place, the imagination of ghosts and the ‘mediatization’ of such imaginations in mass media and popular culture. On the basis of this analysis I will argue that the idea of ghost visions is based on socio-cultural expectations towards a specific material space and that these imaginations are formed by, and in turn form, socio-cultural practices.

My methodological approach is a cultural-historical one. I focus on the connection between practice, imaginations and materiality. These three dimensions must be seen as different aspects of a sociocultural network that produces meaning.<sup>2</sup> In the following study ‘practice’ is understood as the concrete actions people perform in specific contexts and in specific places. However, actions can’t be separated from thinking and imagining, and such actions may form part of individual as well as collective imagina-

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1 See Farrant 2014.

2 The interrelation between imagination, practice and materiality/media is elaborated on a theoretical level by Hall 1997.

tions.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand such practices form imaginations of how the world has to be and on the other hand practices themselves arise from such imaginations. I understand *imagination* as the collective expectations that people have with regard to living in a community and to specific topics that are important for sociocultural cohesion.<sup>4</sup> So both practices and imaginations form the sociocultural collective, the expectations and ideas of a culture, with individual actions and individual ideas. Practices and imaginations also link ideas and expectations with material objects; material objects are connected with specific imaginations. How they work and what meanings they transfer are a result of their connection with sociocultural imaginations. *Materiality* is understood as the disposition of a body, or in the case of objects of a solid substance their location in a concrete time and place. Material objects are always objects in a sociocultural setting; they are produced and used in practices and are also part of specific imaginations.

In this study I will analyse the interrelation between *imagination* relating to spirits connected with the *material place* of Highgate and the *practices* that arise from this connection informed by the expectations towards a haunted place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But before looking at the creepy side of Highgate, some general thoughts about the relation of spirits and cemeteries are fleshed out.

### 1. *Why Should Spirits Haunt Cemeteries?*

Today in Europe we link cemeteries with creepy places. Some of us are scared to visit such a burial place alone at midnight whilst others may love the blood-curdling horror of such an adventure. At first sight it seems surprising to connect cemeteries with ghost – or ghosts with cemeteries, because most people don't die in burial places, but in hospitals. But today, cemeteries seem to be more haunted than hospitals in people's imagination. Why is that the case?

I will focus on Christian popular piety since the Middle Ages in view of the predominantly Christian context of Highgate Cemetery, nevertheless similar ideas undoubtedly exist in other religious traditions and many of these ideas pre-date Christianity. Five aspects of the interrelation between spirit imaginations and burial places will be considered. These five aspects

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3 Gramsci 2012, 1457.

4 For a discussion of the imaginary and imagination see Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015.

are not exhaustive, but they do foreground some significant factors in explaining the interrelation between spirit imaginations and the material place of a cemetery.

The *first* point I want to stress is the imagination that the body and the soul are connected after death.<sup>5</sup> Different Christian denominations believed that the soul is tied to the material body. According to this imagination the soul follows the material mortal remains to the cemeteries.<sup>6</sup> The soul is therefore in an afterworld and at the same time at the cemetery because it is linked to the bones.

*Secondly*, connected to this tight body-soul-relation, the idea exists that the dead might return to the world of the living and may resurrect bodily even before the so-called Last Judgement, at least for a short time.<sup>7</sup> We have here the construction of 'living dead'. Thereby these 'living dead' are ambivalent figures: they can act against living people, especially when the living are disturbing the burial places in an inappropriate way. But the 'living dead' can also help the 'normal living'. One narrative that shows that the dead can be very helpful exists in different parts of Roman-Catholic Central Europe (especially Switzerland and Austria) at least since the 15<sup>th</sup> century; it is called the story of the grateful dead (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> It is said that in the cemetery a knight regularly prays for the poor souls in purgatory. The knight, as the story goes, was once attacked by bandits. He escaped, but the robbers chased him. The knight fled into the cemetery. There the skeletons of the poor souls rose from their graves and drove the bandits back. Finally, the knight was saved by the grateful dead.

In this story for a short time the deceased are 'alive' bodily in the cemetery to save the knight. In this case the cemetery is not a creepy but a holy place and the dead are grateful and decent. They give people what they deserve.

This story shows that imaginations of 'living dead' in cemeteries was widespread in popular piety since medieval times in Europe whereby the burial places and the status of the 'living dead' were ambivalent: the cemeteries are thought of as liminal places between life and death. They are seen as a dwelling for the dead as well as a place where the spaces of the living and the dead can mingle.<sup>9</sup> The dead there may act in favour of the living, or they can punish them. The story of the grateful dead imagines

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5 See Odermatt-Bürgi 2016; Hauser 1994.

6 Odermatt-Bürgi 2016, 70–77.

7 See the medieval ghost-stories in Schmitt 1995.

8 See Höpflinger/Müller 2017, 210.

9 See Sörries 2012.

the resurrected as skeletons and cadavers, not in the sense in which we imagine ghosts today.



Fig. 1: *The grateful dead helping a praying knight against bandits. Wall-painting on the ossuary of Baar (CH), 16<sup>th</sup> century, painted over 1933 (Image: Yves Müller 2017).*

Thirdly, in medieval times there were different concepts of representations of ghosts, as the French medievalist Jean-Claude Schmitt argues, namely different imaginations of the *living dead*. Schmitt distinguishes six types of representations of the dead:<sup>10</sup>

- The Lazarus-type, staging the dead soul as a resurrected person, often in linen bandages.
- The type that represents the dead as a (normal) living person.
- The soul-type that shows the dead as a small naked human figure.
- The ghost-type representing the dead as a white translucent figure (fig. 2).
- The type of the macabre: the dead is imagined as a skeleton or cadaver (as above in fig. 1).

10 Schmitt 1995, 224–225.

- The invisible type where the dead is not visible, but the illustration explains its presence through the context.

In medieval times the Lazarus-Type and the type of the macabre seem to be those most commonly connected to cemeteries (fig. 1), while the other types are more often interrelated with the dead appearing in other contexts, such as in dreams, visions, in houses, in wild regions, and in the role of messengers (fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> Consequently, we can find ghosts of individual persons, but also the dead as a collective (as in the story of the grateful dead) or in normative motifs (e.g. *memento mori* motifs) where the depiction of the dead is used as a reminder to live a good (in the sense of a religiously adequate) life.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 2: *A messenger ghost represented as a translucent figure brings a father news of the death of his son. Painting from around 1275 in: Cantigas de Santa Maria LXXII, Escorial, Ms T I, 1, fol. 80.*

11 See Schmitt 1995.

12 See Schmitt 1995, 117–127.

The *fourth* thread of ghost imagination stems from the 19<sup>th</sup> century where representations of the living dead in the style of a ‹ghost-type› became popularized. The new religious movement called ‹spiritualism› was particularly significant in changing popular imagination of the dead.<sup>13</sup> Modern spiritualism began as a movement in the 1840s in the US and became one of the most prominent new religious movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From an emic point of view, the inception of the modern spiritualist movement can be traced to the year 1848, when a paranormal event in Hydesville (New York, USA) took place.<sup>14</sup> Two sisters Kate and Margaret Fox lived in an old house where they claimed they could contact a spirit through knocking. This spirit, they reported, was the ghost of a murdered peddler. Later it came to light, that the young women made the knocking-sounds of the ghost themselves.

The imagination of the old house as a haunted place, the spirit as a restless soul of a murdered person, and the innocent female medium (medium used here in the sense of a spiritualist medium) became very famous and decisively influenced later conceptions of spirits. Spiritualism adopted former ideas about the interrelation of the body and something not-bodily, and intensified the focus on the individual. The medium – understood as the religious specialist of the spiritualist movement – speaks (from an emic perspective) with individual spirits in contrast to a collective of the unnamed dead or a symbolic representation of the dead like a *memento mori*. The connection with the individual spirit of a deceased person is one of the core elements of the spiritualist practice. Also through spiritualist imaginations and imaginary, for example in spirit photographs, the representation of the dead as a translucent figure became popularized. The other types of the dead categorized by Schmitt can also still be found today (we may think here of corpses, zombies, and contemporary *memento-mori* figures). Nonetheless, it is especially the ghost as a translucent figure which continues to boom through the influence of spiritualism. The connection between spirits and cemeteries was also newly intensified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because bourgeois mourning culture had its climax at the same time.<sup>15</sup> Thereby, the cemetery became a focal point of sociocultural public mourning practices. The cemetery was the place where mourners, especially widows, could act publicly, meet each other and remember the dead in a so-

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13 For an initial overview see: Byrne 2010; Chéroux et al. 2005; Conan Doyle 2009 (from an emic view); Jolly 2006; Willin 2009.

14 See Natale 2016, 42–43.

15 For more information see Taylor 1983; Hoefler 2010.



cio-religious appropriate way. The concurrency of the imagination of spirits and the popularity of cemeteries also influenced the narratives connected with Highgate cemetery.

In the spiritualist imagination, the spirits were normally not evil or demonic (nevertheless such ideas did also exist), but most often simply deceased common people with the same kinds of problems as those who sought to communicate with them had to deal with in life and sometimes they were even wise ghosts who could give advice. So *fitfully*, we have to ask, why the idea of the evil ghost and of the creepy cemetery is so prevalent today. I argue that popular media have done a great deal to diffuse this interrelation. Evil-creepy spirits existed earlier in <folkloristic> culture in which the ghosts of condemned criminals in particular could be understood as dangerous. But these spirits were usually not connected with the cemetery, because cemeteries were (depending on the Christian denomination) consecrated or at least peaceful places, where the dead chose to rest. The connection of cemeteries with creepy places and evil spirits was increased by popular media in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gothic novels and subsequently horror films played a significant role in intensifying the relation between the scary and the cemetery.<sup>16</sup> This point will be fleshed out in the conclusion of the current chapter with reference to Highgate cemetery.

To conclude these brief thoughts, whilst there may be other arguments to connect cemeteries with ghosts, I think the five aspects discussed above are of particular significance: the imagination of a connection between something bodily and something non-bodily (the soul), stressing the individuality of the deceased person, the idea of the cemetery as a liminal place between death and life and the imagination of the cemetery as a creepy place are all crucial aspects that help to explain the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> century imaginations regarding the interrelation between ghosts and burial places. With this in mind, some of the most famous ghosts of Highgate Cemetery will now be discussed.

## *2. Highgate as a Place for Spirits*

Already before the opening of the Victorian cemetery of St James at Highgate ghost-stories were linked to the village of Highgate, and these stories increased once the cemetery was built. As already mentioned in Victorian times the Spiritualist movement and mourning culture had reached their

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16 On the literary tradition see also Niels Penke's contribution in this volume.

climax. Historicism was also very important in Victorian art and architecture: Ancient Greek and Roman styles as well as Pharaonic Egypt were in fashion. The cemetery therefore mirrored the aesthetics and imaginations of different times in different styles: the neo-Gothic columbarium and the neo-Egyptian Crypts in the older west section use, for example, very different historicizing styles.<sup>17</sup> This architectural setting and the formation of the hilly landscape are important in our search for the haunted side of Highgate, because the space forms imaginations of ghosts. The architecture of a cemetery creates creepy shadows; and also many different animals, making scary noises in the dark, live there. The snaky paths in the west part are romantic and allow one to play hide-and-seek. Furthermore, the historicizing buildings may inspire the imagination of earlier historic times and of many lives lived before.

But even more important for the imagination of ghosts is the decay of this cemetery. Highgate was damaged in World War II due to German bombing. By the 1960s Highgate Cemetery was in a desolate state. The American author Richard D. Altick describes the Cemetery as follows: It «represents what would result if the accumulated monuments of Westminster Abbey were transferred, in their full marmoreal extravagance, to the Amazonian rain forest. [...] Trees, saplings, wild shrubs, weeds, all the rank vegetation that a weeping English climate can bring forth, swallow up every tombstone that does not front directly on a path. [...] A machete is not ordinarily part of one's traveling equipment in England, but it would come in handy here.»<sup>18</sup>

This decay of the cemetery happened at the same time as British society experienced a significant change: the 1960s were a time of transformation – sexual freedom, youth culture, drugs, pop music changed the normative base of society, and Highgate's local newspaper reported stories of youth gang violence.<sup>19</sup> The state of the cemetery offered a place for «rebellious» young people where they were not controlled in their social (and sexual) behaviour and could experience new feelings and adventures that were not possible at daytime in an everyday world, as Bill Ellis explains: «By the 1970s(?), the gates around the cemetery itself had deteriorated to the point that groups of adolescents were freely using the space after dark for their own purposes.»<sup>20</sup>

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17 On this confrontation of styles see the contribution by Alberto Saviello in this volume.

18 Altick 1969, 194–195.

19 See Ellis 1993, 19.

20 Ellis 1993, 20.

The social change in society was connected to a religious one: the Christian churches were increasingly criticised, and new religious movements emerged. Wiccan traditions and other forms of paganism and esotericism became popular and formed the so called New Age that connected inter alia more traditional ‹folk-religious› ghost-stories with occultism from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Stories about Satanism emerged from different parts of Britain in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>22</sup> The overgrowing, wild and ‹romantic› cemetery became an ideal matrix to experience and expect/stage New Age-ideas – and with them also spirit-imaginations – on the level of practices. So it is not surprising that most of the spirit sightings at Highgate have been reported in the 1970s.<sup>23</sup> Both sides of the cemetery, the east and the west part, have their own ghost stories. And even Swains Lane, the road separating both parts, is known as a haunted place.

In the following sections I will introduce three ghost stories, one on Swains Lane, one in the east and one in the west part of Highgate cemetery, to elaborate the interrelation between ghosts, imagination, materiality and practice.

### *3.1 A Top-Hat in Swains Lane*

Today Swains' Lane divides the east and the west part of the cemetery. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was mainly a path leading to the grounds of a farm house; later on it was one of four roads to Highgate. The older name was Swines Lane, maybe stemming from the ‹swine› that were herded on the road.<sup>24</sup> On Swains Lane a number of paranormal phenomena are reported to have been observed, for example strange misty forms that were caught only by a camera,<sup>25</sup> the ghost of a body snatcher that was seen during daytime in the year 2012,<sup>26</sup> and a trickster with the name Spring-Heeled-Jack, a figure that played pranks and was used to scare children.<sup>27</sup> Even animal

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21 For the British occultism of this time see Ellis 1993, 14–19. By the term ‹folk-religious› I mean ideas about ghosts that were already in the common imagination of the local people and interrelated with religious concepts, but not officially accepted by organized religious groups, especially the Church of England.

22 See Ellis 1993, 14–19.

23 See Farrant 2014.

24 See Lovell/Marcham 1936, 39.

25 Farrant 2014, 25–26.

26 Farrant 2014, 26–29.

27 Farrant 2014, 12.

ghosts are connected with Swains Lane, especially an invisible horse with phantom hoof noise.<sup>28</sup>

The most prominent ghost of Swains Lane, however, is a dark figure with a top-hat. According to Della Farrant, the first account of this ghost is a letter to the newspaper *Hampstead & Highgate Express* in February 1970 written by a Mr. R. Docherty: «Of when and whom he originated I do not know. Many tales are told, however, about a tall man in a hat who walks across Swains Lane and just disappears through a wall into the cemetery. Local superstition also has it that the bells in the old disused chapel inside the cemetery toll mysteriously whenever he walks.»<sup>29</sup>

Della Farrant quotes another reported sighting in the year 1991. Declan Walsh is said to have seen a tall man «dressed in black, Victorian style clothing including a cape and a top hat. He walked directly towards the gates. The gates were locked shut but he walked straight through them without altering his stride, nor did he make any sounds».<sup>30</sup> Della Farrant collects other sightings of the same figure – again the elegant black Victorian clothing and especially the top hat is its «trademark» – and argues that it could be the ghost of a suicide victim from the year 1865.<sup>31</sup>

The sightings collected by Farrant are characterized by some common imaginations: darkness plays a significant role. The figure is described as obscure; it is mostly seen during night or twilight, it looks humanoid with a human body and human clothes, and disappears suddenly in a ghostlike manner. He looks like a figure from a former time, especially because of the described clothing. And finally the people seeing it are emotionally affected, mostly in a negative manner. The top-hatted-ghost doesn't make them happy, but they are frightened or even scared.

### 3.2 East Cemetery Turns Ghosts Mad

Similar to Swains Lane, the east part also has some specific ghosts connected with this place. One is a lonely figure disappearing as soon as someone can see it, another one (or perhaps the same) is a white shrouded spectre.<sup>32</sup> But the most famous spirit connected solely to Highgate East Cemetery is that of an old «mad» woman that has murdered her children and now she

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28 Farrant 2014, 101–102.

29 Quoted after Farrant 2014, 15.

30 Farrant 2014, 13.

31 Farrant 2014, 20–22.

32 Farrant 2014, 54–56.

restlessly roams over the cemetery where these children are buried. The figure is imagined to have thin hair and to float between the graves very fast.<sup>33</sup>

Della Farrant explains the beginning of this tale by various strange findings of child corpses on the grounds of today's east cemetery or in its proximity.<sup>34</sup> One find is reported on 8 January 1845 in the newspaper *Morning Chronicle* where a story of some boys is told: they climbed on trees in the part that later (in 1860) became the Highgate East Cemetery. «One of the boys got into the tree's trunk, at the bottom of which he discovered a black bundle, which on being opened was found to contain the body of a child. The body was somewhat decomposed, but it is stated that the head is much bruised, and that there are other marks of violence on its person».<sup>35</sup>

Another finding reported by Farrant took place in August 1865, when «a tailor by the name of Robert M. Pringle was making his way home when he stumbled upon a parcel carefully tied up with string, which he took home and opened in the presence of his family. To the horror of all present, as Pringle opened the parcel an infant's head rolled out on the table».<sup>36</sup>

Both crimes couldn't be solved, but Farrant concludes that these cases «may have become conflated over time. The presumed «murderess» becomes the killer of two innocent children despite the twenty-year gap between the killings, and becomes the local «bogywoman». [...] And so perhaps a legend is born.»<sup>37</sup>

In this specific case the idea of the haunted is depicted in different ways: firstly it is based on the imagination of restless spirits. Spirits, as we have seen, can be grateful or evil, but they also can be sad and feel guilty. The «mad» murderess is this third type. Having murdered her children in her madness, she – as this idea goes – now has to haunt a place that was of significance when she lived. The ghost story combines the materiality of a graveyard with a certain imagined morality: people that acted morally correct rest peaceful in their graves; but if someone acted morally wrong and for example killed his/her children, she/he will not find peace after death. The story of the murderess comes with a warning impetus to live a good life.

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33 Farrant 2014, 56–57.

34 Farrant 2014, 57.

35 Quoted after Farrant 2014, 57.

36 Farrant 2014, 57.

37 Farrant 2014, 58.

This spirit-idea is combined with some sort of gruesome-story like finding the mortal remains of children. This very specific historization of the spirit imagination occurs in a «gory» way. The imagination of real murder is much more agitating than the idea that someone invented the ghost story because his/her imagination was caught by some moving branches between the graves. The example shows how the imagination interrelates with normative ideas of a morally correct life (in this case of a mother), but also with the search for historical events as crime scenes that may explain such imaginations.

### 3.3 *West Vampire Hunt*

The most famous ghosts in Highgate live in the west part. This older part of the cemetery dates back to 1839. One of these spirits is a hooded figure looking like a monk that was seen in the 1960s.<sup>38</sup> But even more popular than this monk is a vampire; a famous hunt for it took place in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The Highgate vampire-hunt began on the 21st December 1969.<sup>39</sup> David Farrant, by then a 24 year old Wiccan priest, spent the night on a Wiccan vigil in west Highgate Cemetery because he had heard of some spirit sightings. During this night he was convinced he had seen a ghost. The young man wrote an open letter to the local newspaper (called the *Hampstead and Highgate Express*), published on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1970 with the title «Ghostly walks in Highgate» and stirred a broad interest in the spirits of Highgate. In this letter Farrant asked for reports of other spirit sightings. Different people answered and reported diverse spiritualist accounts, with some of these replies published in the local newspaper. These answers provide important insights into spirit imaginations of the 1960s and are significant accounts used in spiritual literature as «proof» of paranormal phenomena until today.<sup>40</sup> The diversity of these imaginations is conspicuous, as Bill Ellis remarks: «[...] the most impressive detail is the sheer amorphousness of the Highgate traditions; apart from the ghostly cyclist, hardly two informants gave the same story».<sup>41</sup>

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38 Farrant 2014, 34.

39 My description of these events follows the historical reconstruction of the Highgate vampire-mania by Ellis 1993.

40 See Farrant 2014.

41 Ellis 1993, 22.

Because of dead foxes found in Highgate, on February 27<sup>th</sup> of the same year, the then 25 year old photographer Sean Manchester, who was himself highly interested in spiritual accounts, explained in an interview published on the front page of the same newspaper with the title «Does a wampyr walk in Highgate?», that a vampire is living in Highgate West Cemetery. In this article Sean Manchester's idea is explained as follows: «His theory is that the King Vampire of the Undead, originally a nobleman who dabbled in black magic in medieval Wallachia, «somewhere near Turkey,» walks again. «His followers eventually brought him to England in a coffin at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and bought a house for him in the West End,» said Mr. Manchester. «His unholy resting place became Highgate Cemetery.»»<sup>42</sup> Sean Manchester explained that it was necessary to find the grave of this Vampire king and to behead the corpse. Black magicians and Satanists use Highgate for weird rituals and to serve the vampire, he further stated.

The whole vampire panic got out of control on a Friday 13<sup>th</sup> in March 1970. Manchester planned an official vampire hunt at the beginning of the night. ITV-News, the news-platform of the most popular private British Television Channel ITV, covered the topic, interviewed Farrant and Manchester and broadcasted these interviews on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. The transmission shows the influence of mass media on these vampire-imaginations. The effect was that two hours later a mob of vampire-hunters gathered in front of Highgate West Cemetery and finally broke into the cemetery.<sup>43</sup> The police was on the spot, but could not do anything against this vampire-mob. Manchester – according to his own report – entered the graveyard. He searched a specific catacomb and entered it through the broken roof. There he found empty coffins in which he laid garlic.

On 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1970 the police found the headless remains of a female corpse (that was originally buried in the cemetery) outside of a broken vault. The police intensified their patrols at Highgate and arrested Farrant. Later Manchester accomplished some exorcistic rituals where the headless corpse was found and he explained that he had found the vampire and killed it.<sup>44</sup>

For several years the story went on and had some other climaxes, for example a magical duel between Farrant and Manchester who were rivals then and both claimed to be the president of the British Occult Society (it

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42 Hampstead & Highgate Express, 27.2.1970, front page.

43 Ellis 1993, 24–25.

44 Ellis 1993, 27.

was a duel that never took place because Farrant did not show up at the meeting point). Also a scandal occurred because Farrant, his girlfriend and some other friends carried on to make some rituals at Highgate in which the women were nude (and Farrant took photos of it). Finally, in 1974 Farrant was arrested because of vandalism.

Since the 1970s the Highgate vampire plays an important role in the ghost stories of this region. It shows a quite complex interrelation between 1970s New Age and occultism-ideas, Bram Stockers book *Dracula*, folkloristic elements and especially (horror-)films, as Bill Ellis states: «Much of what he [= Manchester] later did and said was not actually based on the folk tradition of vampires; rather it derived from the international popular culture descended from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the many low-budget movies the novel inspired».45

It is indeed conspicuous that shortly before (and during) the vampire-hunt in Highgate a series of films with a very similar topic were released. Notably the Hammer Film Production-movies *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (Freddie Francis, GB 1968) and *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, GB 1970) influenced the imaginations about a vampire at Highgate.46 The later one even includes scenes shot at Highgate West Cemetery (fig. 3). That the cemetery has been abandoned and is in bad shape at that time, is another important aspect to explain the vampire-mania at Highgate. The (film inspired) imagination that spirits and vampire need or even love creepy places, becomes apparent. The abandoned state of the Cemetery made it possible not only to imagine all sorts of strange creatures living there, but also to enter the cemetery during the night time. To improve the bad reputation of the cemetery it was important to clean it up, as Bill Ellis states «after Farrant's trial gave added attention to the state of the cemetery, an organization was founded to put the site in better shape. The Friends of Highgate Cemetery, after fifteen years of fund-raising and restoration work, were able in 1990 to reopen the Victorian monuments to the public».47

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45 Ellis 1993, 24.

46 See Poole 2015, 141.

47 Ellis 1993, 34.





*Fig. 3: Alice Hargood (played by Linda Hayden) leads Lucy Paxton (played by Isla Blair) into Highgate Cemetery (Film still: Taste the Blood of Dracula, 00:46:26).*

I therefore argue that in this case we find an interrelation between the materiality of a cemetery (in this example the abandoned state of the place) and specific imaginations. These imaginations are initiated by the materiality and resulted in sociocultural practices (like vampire-hunts). These practices are linked to religious ideas of how to fight against (imagined) evil forces. So, again, we find a close interrelation between the materiality of a place, specific imaginations, and (socio-religious) practices.

#### *4. Haunted Reflections*

In the 1980s the «Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust» (founded 1975) restored the cemetery and reopened it in 1990. The restoration did not end the sightings of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena,<sup>48</sup> but they began to recede. This hints again at an interrelation between imaginations of the supernatural, socio-religious practices around them, and the setting in the materiality of a cemetery. As a conclusion I want to consider this relation.

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48 For newer spirit sightings see Farrant 2014.

As I have already mentioned, popular media influences spirit ideas especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries:<sup>49</sup> new sorts of media, such as gothic novels, photography, radio and film became part of and effected ghost-concepts. As constructed in famous gothic novels and later in horror films, the haunted place was connected to a specific sort of materiality, especially run-down and shabby locations like old houses, overgrown forests or winding alleys. It is quite surprising that hospitals where people die are not perceived as creepy unless they are abandoned or the lights are shut down. Obviously there is an imagination of a specific place where ghosts *live* and appear to people. This idea is not based on reasonable assumptions, but far more influenced by media representations. We know from novels and from films what a haunted place should look like and how a ghost should behave. These media representations show how to act in case of a meeting with such a ghost which is also the case at Highgate Cemetery as the following three observations will show.

Firstly, on the level of socio-religious practices, we find religious New Age-practices at Highgate such as vampire-hunts, invitations to black masses with demon-invocations, or the performing of spiritual rituals. These practices are highly influenced by media representations. Sean Manchester knew that a vampire had to be stabbed with a wooden stake. Not because he ever did this before, but because films and literature tell us that this is the only way to kill vampires. Also the public and tourist interest in such paranormal phenomena at Highgate and other cemeteries is influenced by media representations. Tourists are looking for haunted places and want to experience sensations similar to the ones induced by a good horror film.

Secondly, both types of practices are influenced by imaginations of an afterlife existence that are based on traditions. Ghosts-ideas are usually not something innovative, but they reproduce traditional ideas of an afterlife existence and the relation between the body and something else. Spirits are often connected with imaginations of trespassing the norms of society (or religion). A nice and friendly 101 year old happy grandmother that dies in peace, does not become a haunting spirit. Ghost-stories need some drama and shudder. In the case of our examples, they are linked to an abnormal death: the top-hatted figure is explained as a suicide victim; the *mad* old woman as a murderer, and the vampire as a living-dead. So ghost stories

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49 On the other hand, the spiritualist movement had a significant influence on popular media culture, as Simone Natale argues. Spirit evocations and séances were staged as shows and also had a function to entertain. See Natale 2016.

can also be seen as coping-strategies with something beyond the socially accepted idea of a good death.<sup>50</sup>

Thirdly, the practices around paranormal phenomena at Highgate are also connected to expectations towards a cemetery, and specifically its materiality. Ghosts are often thought of as being tied to specific materials (such as tombstones), and rituals are embedded in specific material contexts. The darker and shabbier a place is, the higher the probability that some spirits are thought/supposed to live there. Ghosts do not seem to like clean areas. The link between ghosts and cemeteries is based on religious imaginations on an afterlife. These imaginations are connected with the practice of collecting the mortal remains at a specific place of the dead. These places of the dead are, as we have seen, liminal places between life in this world and life in an afterworld.<sup>51</sup> In abandoned cemeteries this liminality is accumulated: the places are then not only places between life and death, but also between culture and nature.

When Highgate was abandoned and Swains lane was trapped between the two parts of the cemetery the cemetery offered a dark and mysterious liminal place. Thus, it is not surprising that different types of practices (the New Age-religion as well as the public attention towards paranormal activities at Highgate) have been in decline since the cleaning-up of the cemetery in the 1980s. So, if you want to see ghosts today, you have to intensify this liminality: visit at midnight (the liminal time between two days), perhaps when it rains or it is misty (so your sight is impeded), and search for the more overgrown parts (the ones between culture and nature) of the cemetery. And you should necessarily read a gothic novel or watch a horror film before your trip.

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50 For cultural imaginations regarding the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ death see Feldmann 2004, 179–202.

51 For the theory regarding liminality, esp. Victor Turner, see the introduction to this volume.

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## V. Images of Eternity



# «Simply to thy Cross I cling» Hymns and the Performance of Memory in Victorian Highgate Cemetery

Sean Michael Ryan

At the heart of this paper lies the *affective* force of hymns that silently re-sound amidst the inscriptions and sepulchral imagery of Victorian Highgate.<sup>1</sup> Bereaved Victorian families frequently chose lines from popular hymns as epitaphs for their loved ones, or selected grave designs and sculptures which evoked verbal or visual images from favourite hymns. It is a hymn's ability to stir the imagination and move the heart that made them ideally suited to memorialise a lost loved one. This emotional power was clearly recognized by writers of the period, such as Duncan Campbell in his study *Hymns and Hymn Makers*: «a good hymn should have certain striking ideas, vividly, memorably expressed, those ideas forming a connected whole. [...] A hymn has to do with the emotions rather than with the intellect [...]»<sup>2</sup> The affective force of hymn verses or imagery on grave monuments functioned both to memorialise the virtuous life and «good death» of the mourned loved-one, as well as providing the stimulus to move the grave monument's audience to emulate these virtues for themselves, stirred by the evocative lines, and recollected tune, of the chosen hymn.

This paper will begin by outlining the Victorian ideal of a «good death», in order to understand how a bereaved family's choice of grave monument formed an integral component of this ideal. Attention will focus on one specific grave-type, the recurrent design of a female figure clinging to a cross founded upon rock, evoking the popular hymn, «Rock of Ages». The lyrics of this hymn will be read in the context of its original composition as well as its later reception in the Victorian era, sensitive to the ubiquity

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- 1 In line with Juslin 2019, 43–52 «affect» is here used as an umbrella-term to refer to a range of evaluative reactions and responses, covering emotions, moods and preferences. The «affective» aspect that is the principal concern of this study, however, is a subject's *emotional* response to music (and lyrics). On music and the emotions see Juslin/Sloboda 2010 and Cochrane/Fantini/Scherer 2013.
  - 2 Campbell 1903, xvi.

of allusions to a wide variety of hymn traditions in Victorian garden cemeteries. This contextual backdrop will inform this paper's test-case study: the grave monument of two young girls, Otilie and Frances Reissmann in Highgate East cemetery. The gendered imagery of their sculptured monument, evoking Toplady's hymn, provides insights into how the virtuous lives of these two deeply mourned girls was memorialised by their family and had the affective power to move visitors to this gravestone to recall and emulate the theological virtue of faith. The affective force of the hymn-imagery in this test-case will be teased-out with the aid of performance theory, reflecting upon the grave monument as the «script» of a past and potentially perpetual performance which functions as a medium for the creation of memory.

### 1. *The Victorian Ideal of a «Good Death»*

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Evangelical movement<sup>3</sup> disseminated a wide range of journals and tracts aimed at instructing the faithful with examples of how to live and die well, often culminating in an idealised death-bed scene. One such publication, the *Evangelical Magazine*, published from 1793–1892, often included a memorial to a recently deceased evangelical, not infrequently a minister, at the beginning of a monthly issue, the idealised death having an exemplary value for readers. Such memorials usually ran to about five pages with the death-bed scene taking-up much of the final page.<sup>4</sup> The convention of such a scene was that the dying person should die peacefully, expressing confidence in the salvation that awaits, confirming their own faith and serving as a model for imitation by others.<sup>5</sup> The faith and devotion of the dying family member was supported by reciting passages from biblical texts, devotional literature or favourite hymns as they lay dying, read aloud by turns, either

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3 See Jalland 1996, 17–38; Riso 2015, 209–226; Vogt 2004, 15–51.

On evangelicalism, in its broad sense, denoting a complex movement of renewal and revival that arose in the eighteenth century and influenced almost all emerging and established Christian traditions in Victorian Britain (Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Anglicans) see Bebbington 1989.

4 Jalland 1996, 21.

5 See Jalland 1996, 23–25 on the sharp contrast between private letters and published accounts of the death of family members. Victorians were well aware of the gap between ideal and reality, knowing from personal experience that loved ones were all too commonly prevented by pain and lack of strength and clarity of mind to attain the ideals of a «good death».



by members of the family around the bedside or the dying person, to the extent that the intensity of the pain permitted.

Victorian expectations of a «good death» drew upon and reshaped devotional literature on the «art of dying» (*ars moriendi*) from the medieval and early modern period, most notably the influential works of the Anglican bishop Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, first published in the aftermath of the English Civil War in 1650–51.<sup>6</sup> In the dedicatory letter to *Holy Dying*, Taylor encapsulates the art of dying well as follows: «it is a great art to dye well, and to be learnt by men in health [...]. All that a sick and dying man can do is but to exercise those vertues, which he before acquired, and to perfect that repentance which was begun more early.»<sup>7</sup> The Victorian ideal retained the importance of a virtuous life as preparatory for a «good death», but supplemented this with a greater interest in recounting and memorialising the faithful life of the deceased as exemplary for those left behind.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, the choice of grave monument and inscription was considered with great care, sensitive to the continuity between a good life and a good death, memorialising the moral seriousness of the deceased and their preparedness for death.<sup>9</sup> As a site of consolation for the family left behind, and remembrance of the virtues of the deceased, the interplay of grave-stone, imagery, and inscription shed light on the manner in which the deceased's family wished their loved one's respectable life and death to be remembered.

## 2. Victorian Grave Types and the Hymn «Rock of Ages»

A prominently recurring Victorian grave type in Highgate Cemetery is of a plain cross arising out of a rock, or a cluster of rocks. Although the whole monument is fashioned from stone, the cross is sculpted to imitate living wood, replete with bark and rings, whilst the founding stone is suggestive of a weighty granite or limestone. A particularly striking variant of this motif occurs with the inclusion of a figure, usually female or angelic, hold-

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6 See Taylor 1989a (1650); Taylor 1989b (1651). George Eliot includes «Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*» among the limited reading material of her morally serious protagonist, Adam Bede, who sought to improve his lot as a carpenter by attending night-school. (Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 2008 (1859), 231; novel set in 1799).

7 Taylor 1989b (1651), 6.

8 Riso 2015, 209.

9 See Jalland 1996, 292–295.

ing onto a cross founded upon rock. This grave-type alludes to the eighteenth century prayer, which subsequently became a hymn, «Rock of Ages», written by the Rev. Augustus Toplady (1776).<sup>10</sup> Whilst some of the monuments explicitly cite a line, usually from verse 3, «Simply to thy Cross I cling», emblazoned on the cross-piece, others offer a more allusive reference to the sentiment of the hymn by sculpting a female figure clinging to a cross founded upon rock.

Toplady's verse-prayer «Rock of Ages» arose out of a very specific context of polemical pamphleteering between «Calvinist» and «Wesleyan/Arminian» interpretations of atonement and sanctification in the late eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> His original article, which appeared in the *Gospel Magazine* that he edited, in March 1776, was scathing in its opposition to John Wesley, with Toplady adamant that sanctified believers could not refrain from sinful acts in the present life, but by contrast, remained desperately corrupted by sin.<sup>12</sup> Toplady drew an analogy between the rising National Debt and the extent of sinfulness among believers (which he calculated as exceeding 315,000,000 sins by the age of ten), yet in the latter case the almost incalculable debt of sin could be written-off by Christ.<sup>13</sup> The article concluded with a prayer addressed to Christ, the «Rock of Ages», to illustrate his argument, headed «A living and dying PRAYER for the HOLIEST BELIEVER in the World.»<sup>14</sup>

Despite the divisive and polemical purpose of Toplady's original verse composition, its ongoing reception-history softened and reframed the

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10 See McDannell 1995, 123 «A popular marker for graves [in] ... Victorian cemeteries was a statue of a robed woman draping her arm around a cross or mournfully leaning against it. The image is not biblical. It comes from the hymn «Rock of Ages.»»

11 See Brooks 1997, 81–98. Stead 1898, 140: «Toplady was a sad polemist, whose orthodox soul was outraged by the Arminianism of the Wesleys. He and they indulged in much disputation of the brickbat and Billingsgate order, as was the fashion in those days.»

12 See Brown 2004, 213.

13 For the full content of Toplady's original 1776 article see: <http://www.toplady.org.uk/toplady%20writings/Gospel%20Magazine.htm> (accessed June 28, 2018).

14 Brooks 1997, 91 ««Rock of Ages» [functions] as a gospel homily of focused meditation. Written to make Christ's crucifixion real in popular worship...[emphasizing how] Christ can offer gospel grace to those who, through faith, can hide in his «riven side.»»

The prayer/hymn focuses upon the pierced side of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel's crucifixion account, from which flows water and blood (see Jn 19:33–34), as well as an allegorical identification of Christ with the Rock in the Israelites' wilderness wanderings (see 1 Cor 10:1–4; Exod 17:1–7; see also Isa 26:4).

piece, and as a consequence opened it up to an ever widening audience, as Candy Gunther Brown insightfully comments:

Ironically, nineteenth-century evangelicals of every denomination – including Methodists – appropriated Toplady’s hymn to promote Christian unity...The publication history of Toplady’s «Rock of Ages» illustrates how hymnbook editors, compilers and translators acted as cultural arbiters by framing, selecting, and altering hymns to encourage evangelical unity on denominational terms.<sup>15</sup>

An altered version of Toplady’s «Rock of Ages», set to a tune by the American composer Thomas Hastings (1830), was published in the *Methodist Hymnal* (1878), «transforming the hymn’s theology from a statement denying the possibility of entire sanctification to a prayer for its attainment.»<sup>16</sup> The revised version toned down the extent of human sin emphasized by Toplady and situated the hymn in the section of the hymnbook dealing with a sinner’s need for repentance rather than indicative of the continuing sinfulness of the sanctified believer (fig. 1).

«Rock of Ages», became one of the most popular hymns of the Victorian era, evidenced, for example, by its entry in the published survey of a cross-section of Victorian society by the journalist W. T. Stead in 1896.<sup>17</sup> It was also ranked number one in a poll of 3,500 readers in 1897 (*Sunday at Home Magazine*), indicative of the tastes of «late Victorian middle-class evangelicals».<sup>18</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century «Rock of Ages» was published in an extensive range of hymn books of various denominations, whilst the British Prime Minister William Gladstone (1848) translated it into Greek, Latin and Italian, with the Latin version sung at his funeral.<sup>19</sup> The hymn was also reportedly a favourite of Prince Albert, who is described as reverently repeating the opening lines as he lay dying in Windsor Castle in 1861, in an idealized death-bed account.<sup>20</sup>

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15 Brown 2004, 213–214

16 Brown 2004, 214–215.

17 Stead 1898, 141 on «Rock of Ages» – «No other English hymn can be named which has laid so broad and firm a grasp on the English speaking world.»

18 Bradley 2005, 213; Bradley 1997, 193. «Rock of Ages» received 3,215 votes, whilst only three other hymns had more than 3000 votes, they were: «Abide with me», «Jesu, lover of my soul» and «Just as I am».

19 Brooks 1997, 91–92.

20 Bradley 1997, 197.

<i>Toplady's Original Version (1776)</i>	<i>Methodist Hymnal (1878)</i>
<i>A living and dying PRAYER for the HOLIEST BELIEVER in the World</i>	
Rock of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee! Let the Water and the Blood, From thy riven Side which flow'd, Be of Sin the double Cure, Cleanse me from its Guilt and Pow'r.	Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee; let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure.
Not the Labors of my hands Can fulfill thy Law's demands: Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow, All for Sin could not atone: Thou must save, and thou alone!	Could my tears forever flow, could my zeal no languor know these for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to thy Cross I cling; Naked, come to thee for Dress; Helpless, look to thee for grace; Foul, I to the Fountain fly: Wash me, SAVIOR, or I die!	In my hand no price I bring; Simply to thy Cross I cling.
Whilst I draw this fleeting breath When my eye-strings break in death When I soar through tracts un- known See thee on thy Judgment-Throne ROCK of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in THEE!	While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyes shall close in death, when I rise to worlds unknown, and behold thee on thy throne, Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Fig. 1: *Toplady's original prayer (1776) and the revised lyrics of the hymn «Rock of Ages» (1878).*

Hymns with near universal popularity in the mid-late Victorian era were typically eighteenth-century Evangelical hymns, like «Rock of Ages». These pieces had benefited from a century-long reception-history which saw them picked-up, re-edited, and set to new tunes in the nineteenth century, leading to crossover success by their inclusion in a vast range of hymn-

books of all denominations. Aside from these ubiquitously popular hymns, favourite forms and styles varied from denomination to denomination (and from hymn-book to hymn-book), influenced by social class and aesthetic preference. The range of styles varied dramatically, from the congregational hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley originating from Dissenting and Non-Conformist traditions, to the antiquarian preference for verse translations of pre-Reformation hymns and chants by John M. Neale beloved by the Tractarians. Particularly popular were the catchy, emotional tunes of gospel and sacred songs popularized by American revivalists, notably Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey.<sup>21</sup>

Citations or allusions to all of these hymn-traditions are exemplified in the sepulchral monuments of the Magnificent Seven cemeteries, of which a few select examples will suffice to illustrate the range. Abney Park's non-conformist heritage is exemplified by the monumental sculpture of Isaac Watts (1674–1748), one of the finest and most influential hymn-writers of the eighteenth century. Nunhead cemetery includes graves with citations of hymns by the evangelical theologian Samuel P. Tregelles («Tis sweet to think of those at rest», 1846)<sup>22</sup> as well as the American revivalist hymn «Over the line» by Ellen Knight Bradford (1878), published in Sankey's *Gospel Hymns*,<sup>23</sup> a hymn tradition also evidenced in the chorus of «When the mists have rolled away» (1883) by Annie H. Barker at Abney Park, another Sankey tune.<sup>24</sup> Finally, a Tractarian preference is exemplified in a ci-

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21 See Bradley 1997 and Gant 2015, 285–310, on different styles and genres of hymns and the production of a plethora of hymnbooks, many of which contained an eclectic mix in the later Victorian era; see also Coffey 1996.

22 Grave of Edith Emily Einchcomb (1924); verse 1 «TIS sweet to think of those at rest, Who sleep in Christ the Lord, Whose spirits now with Him are blest, According to His word.» [https://hymnary.org/text/tis\\_sweet\\_to\\_think\\_of\\_those\\_at\\_rest](https://hymnary.org/text/tis_sweet_to_think_of_those_at_rest) (accessed June 3, 2018).

23 Grave of Elizabeth Hughes (1907); part of the chorus «Over the line!—Why should I remain, With a step between me and Jesus?» [https://hymnary.org/text/o\\_tender\\_and\\_sweet\\_was\\_the\\_fathers\\_voice](https://hymnary.org/text/o_tender_and_sweet_was_the_fathers_voice) (accessed June 3, 2018).

24 Grave of Philip Edward Griggs (1895); final verse «We shall come with joy and gladness, We shall gather round the throne; Face to face with those that love us, We shall know as we are known: And the song of our redemption, Shall resound thro' endless day, When the shadows have departed, And the mists have rolled away.» [https://hymnary.org/text/when\\_the\\_mists\\_have\\_rolled\\_in\\_splendor](https://hymnary.org/text/when_the_mists_have_rolled_in_splendor) (accessed June 3, 2018).

tation of the closing lines of John Henry Newman's, «Lead Kindly Light» (1833) in Highgate East Cemetery.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Grave Monument: Otilie and Frances Reissmann (Highgate East Cemetery)

The final section of this paper focuses upon the grave of two young sisters Otilie and Frances Reissmann, in Highgate East cemetery, attentive to the role that the choice of gravestone plays in the memorialized performance of their respectable Victorian lives and deaths. The gravestone is of monumental height, comprised of three interconnected levels (figs. 2 and 3).



Fig. 2: Grave Monument of Otilie and Frances Reissmann (Image: Sean Ryan 2018).

Fig 3: Detail of the epitaphs to the deceased sisters (Image: Sean Ryan 2018).

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25 Grave of Maria Morton (1926); final two lines «And with the morn those angel faces smile, Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.» [https://hymnary.org/text/lead\\_kindly\\_light\\_amid\\_the\\_encircling\\_gl](https://hymnary.org/text/lead_kindly_light_amid_the_encircling_gl) (accessed June 3, 2018).

Methodologically, this section of the paper draws upon «performance theory» in which artefacts such as sepulchral monuments are interpreted «as focal points of past and future performance».<sup>26</sup> In a performance there are three interrelated aspects: actors, audience and script.<sup>27</sup> In the context of Victorian Highgate, the «actors» are comprised of the Reissmann family who commissioned or selected the monument type plus the stone-mason(s) who designed the grave,<sup>28</sup> as well the grave itself, which communicates a performance to an audience. The «audience» are those who view the performance within the stage-setting of Highgate cemetery, and as such may potentially refer to a multiplicity of audiences over time, from the original funerary mourners of the deceased girls in the 1880s-1890s, to contemporary paying-visitors to the cemetery in the twenty-first century. The «script» is the performance's guiding text, which here denotes «the design of the memorial, which includes features such as its size, material type, decoration, location, and inscription content.»<sup>29</sup>

In the analysis that follows, the focus will principally limit itself to a study of the «script» of the Reissmann grave monument as performed in its original «staging» in Victorian Highgate of the 1890s, sensitive to the *affec-tive* power of its performance, scripted by the Reissmann family striving to come to terms with the tragic early death of their beloved daughters, staged for a Victorian «audience» familiar with the evangelical ideals of a «good death». Each of the three-levels of this grave monument's «script» will be interpreted in turn, from ground-level up, paying particular attention to the allusive echoes of Toplady's hymn at its summit.

The «script» of the ground-level grave-stone identifies the sisters as the «much beloved» daughters of their parents, the German immigrants, Henry and Frances Reissmann. The tragically early deaths of both sisters are precisely documented, with Frances' death poignantly occurring the day after her fourteenth birthday. Yet, amidst this tragedy, there rings out an emphatic declaration of Christian faith – the two sisters are «dead yet alive.»<sup>30</sup>

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26 Jasinski 2013, 60–67(63). See Laneri 2007, 5 on the importance of studying the materiality of (ancient) burial practice and ritual performance, attentive to the extant archaeological, textual and artistic elements which form the «tesserae of a larger mosaic of knowledge».

27 See Alexander 2004, 530–532.

28 For Victorian books detailing grave-type designs for stone-mason see Maliphant 1820 and Clarkson 1852–1865.

29 Jasinski 2013, 67.

30 See Rom 6:11; Gal 2:20.

Ottilie Laura was the eldest and Eugenie Frances the seventh of ten children born to Henry G. Reissmann (Gottlieb Heinrich Reissmann) and Marie Doris Louise Franziska (or 'Frances') Reissmann (née Boerngen). Originally from Saxony, Henry was an East India Merchant in lace goods who emigrated to London in the 1860s where he eventually ran his own export company («Henry Reissmann & Co.»), whilst his wife originated from Hanover.<sup>31</sup> Although five of their six sons grew into adulthood,<sup>32</sup> all four of their daughters died tragically young, including the death in their teens of Ottilie and Frances, memorialised on this monumental gravestone. Ottilie died at home, at «Saxony Villa» in Primrose Hill, in 1885, following months of heart-disease.<sup>33</sup> Her younger sister, (Eugenie) Frances, died in a hospital on the Isle of Wight, from meningitis in 1892.<sup>34</sup>

Sadly, the premature deaths of these two young girls was all too common in Victorian Britain. Harrowingly high infant mortality rates<sup>35</sup> raised the omnipresent spectre of a «bad death» from a rapid demise from fever or typhoid, which may prevent any meaningful farewell with the sufferer's family and prove an obstacle to conscious prayer, confession of sins and repentance. Yet, childhood death, for example by tuberculosis (more commonly referred to as «consumption» by the Victorians), was partially coped with by focusing on the time and occasion it allowed for a «good death», such that this illness became romanticised in art and literature of the period.<sup>36</sup>

Victorian children's hymns commonly addressed the topic of death, recognised as an ever-present reality among its young audience.<sup>37</sup> Children's hymns had a clear didactic function, seeking to teach children to face the death of their siblings, their school-friends, and even their own untimely death, with faith and courage, grounded in the hope of blessed reward in heaven. In line with the theological reasoning of consolation literature of the period aimed at their parents, Victorian children's hymns also

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31 Source: Census data 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, plus Grant of Probate and Will of Henry Reissmann.

32 Charles, Richard, Alfred, Edwin and Felix.

33 Source: Death certificate. Ottilie was baptised in the church of St John the Baptist, Savoy Strand, the German Church, by Rev. Dr Scholl on 29 August 1869.

34 Source: Death certificate.

35 Jalland 1999, 237. One quarter of all nineteenth century deaths were babies dying during their first year, whilst the overall death rate among children remained fairly constant from 1840–1900 at circa 150 deaths per 1,000 live births.

36 See Jalland 1999, 234.

37 See Tamke 1978, 75–90; Wheeler 1990, 48–50; Jalland 1996, 119–142; Bradley 1997, 112–120.



strove to present a theological rationale for the untimely death of children to their young audience. An early death was a benevolent act of God, sparing a child from growing-up in this world of pain and sin, this «vale of tears», removing them to the blessedness of heaven, where they await the future reunion of the whole family.<sup>38</sup>

Children, and their families, drawing near to death might draw strength and comfort from children's hymns on the topics of death and heavenly reward. This is strikingly exemplified in the actions of Cattie (aged 10) and Chattie (aged 5 ½ ), two of the five children of the future Archbishop of Canterbury Archibald Tait and his wife Catherine (née Spooner) who all tragically died of scarlet fever in 1856 in Carlisle.<sup>39</sup> The two sisters, when approaching death, encouraged the whole family to sing a favourite hymn together with the chorus «Oh! That will be joyful, when we meet to part no more!»<sup>40</sup> Victorian children's hymns could provide constructive resources for the «art of dying well», reducing children's fears of the omnipresence of death by continually preparing them throughout their young lives to cope with the loss of loved ones, or even their own untimely death.

The central level of the Reissmann monument's «script» cites a portion of the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29–32) according to the translation of the King James Version, a New Testament Gospel canticle which has been prayed and sung in the daily liturgies of the church since at least the fourth century AD.<sup>41</sup> In its original context the canticle is a blessing addressed to God by an aged prophet, Simeon, on greeting the infant Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple, that he can now be discharged from his service to the Lord, departing this life in peace, having seen the future salvation of all people, Israel and Gentiles. In Victorian Britain the *Nunc Dimittis* was included as an Evening Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer* and often

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38 Jalland 1996, 122–123, who also refers to consolation literature aimed at parents, eg. *Our Children's Rest; or Comfort for Bereaved Mothers* (1863); *To a Christian Parent on the Death of an Infant*, Religious Tract Society, no. 351 (1852); *Early Death: Thoughts for a Week of Mourning*, London, SPCK, 1861.

39 See Jalland 1996, 127–139 drawing on the journal and memoir accounts of both parents: Archibald Tait: Tait papers vol. 39 fols. 1–128; *Catherine and Crauford Tait, Wife and Son of Archbishop A.C. Tait: A Memoir*, ed. Revd. William Benham (1879), 251–253, 403, 408–409. Only two of their seven children will survive this outbreak of scarlet fever.

40 Jalland 1996, 133–134. Both sisters request to sing the hymn «Here we suffer grief and pain» by Thomas Bilby (1831–1832). [https://hymnary.org/text/here\\_we\\_suffer\\_grief\\_and\\_pain](https://hymnary.org/text/here_we_suffer_grief_and_pain) (accessed June 23, 2018).

41 Westermeyer 1998, 48.

prayed or sung as part of a funeral service. The central level of the Reissmann monument is consistent with the tenor of Victorian consolation literature, which sought to comfort bereaved parents that their children had «departed» to the Lord, removed from an unhappy world of illness and pain. Consolation literature also commonly included images such as an angel carrying-off a sleeping child to a happier existence in heaven, which are replicated in popular grave-monuments in Highgate and other Victorian cemeteries.<sup>42</sup>



Fig. 4: *Ottilie and Frances Reissmann Grave Monument, detail*  
(Image: Sean Ryan 2018).

Fig. 5: *First Communion Photograph (1911)*, (Hobbs 2006, 55).

The upper level of the Reissmann monument's «script» offers a visual exegesis of Toplady's hymn, «Rock of Ages». A veiled, female figure, embraces a stylized wooden cross, founded on rock (fig. 4), encapsulating a line from verse 3, «Simply to thy Cross I cling». The figure gazes upwards at the cross, garlanded with roses.<sup>43</sup> Strikingly, such a posture, of a woman ten-

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42 Jalland 1999, 238. See the contribution by Natalie Fritz in this volume.

43 On the range of meaning of «roses» in Victorian floral emblems, including ephemeral beauty, love and virtue, see Ann Jeffer's contribution «Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?» in this volume.

derly embracing a Cross, representing Christ, was repeated not simply in monumental art but also in photographic portraits of the period. June Hadden Hobbs has identified a number of late Victorian and Edwardian photographs of young girls, often taken when they were making their first communion, imitating this pose (fig. 5).

A female figure embodying unswerving fidelity to Christ, and especially his atoning death on the cross, could be transposed from allegorical depictions of an Evangelical virtue, to a role for believers to imitate in performing a good life and death. As Hobbs perceptively notes, the ideals valorized in the hymn «Rock of Ages» and reproduced in Victorian grave-monuments that illustrated it could also be used to create or even encourage ideals as to how the faithful should perform a good life and a good death: «Ideal faith is like a pious woman clinging to a cross that is her only support in the storms of life.»<sup>44</sup>

The upper level of the Reissmann monument has a performative function in exhibiting the good lives and good deaths of the two young girls, memorializing their Christian virtue of «faith». The sculpture of the veiled young woman at the summit of the Reissmann monument personifies Christian faith. The image is a Victorian re-imagining of Faith «*Fides*», one of the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity), which was represented in medieval and renaissance art as a young woman holding a cross and a chalice.<sup>45</sup> As a result the upper layer of the Reissmann monument embodies the affective ideals of Toplady's hymn, of remaining lovingly faithful to Christ alone, the «Rock of Ages», who alone can save. Otilie and Frances, who are buried here, are perpetually identified with this personified theological virtue through the monumental art of their grave-stone.

The Victorian «audience» of this monument may have been moved by the *affective* sentiment of this most popular hymn, «Rock of Ages», vividly recalled in sculptured personification (upper level), to retain in their memory the good lives and faithful deaths of these two young Christian daughters (ground level), who have departed, as faithful servants like Simeon in the Gospel, to be with the Lord (central level). The visual evocation of the hymn aims to stir its original Victorian viewers to recall the unstated lines of this most popular of all 19<sup>th</sup> century hymns, to remember and silently

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44 Hobbs 2006, 64.

45 Måle 2000, 113: «The Faith of the Middle Ages is the belief in the virtue of the sacrifice of the Cross, but it is also (as the chalice proves) faith in the perpetuity of that sacrifice day by day miraculously renewed on the altar.»

re-vocalise the familiar lyrics for themselves, particularly the resounding declaration of faith in divine grace at its heart: «Simply to thy Cross I cling». In this way the «script» of this sepulchral monument functions as a hymn-script for its 19<sup>th</sup> century audience, encouraging them to join in this chorus of praise, and even more to perform and imitate the virtue of «faith» that the young sisters who this monument celebrates, embodied in their young lives. Additionally, the *affective* force of this hymn would encourage its Victorian viewers to re-live and recall instances in their own lives, striking moments from their own episodic memory, perhaps at an earlier funeral of one of their own loved ones, in which they heard and sang these same lyrics before. As Patrik Juslin stresses, songs (not least hymns) can function as powerful memory-cues: «Emotion serves as a marker for episodic memory [...] Listeners are more likely to retrieve a spontaneous memory when they are cued by a song that moves them emotionally.»<sup>46</sup> Finally, this sepulchral monument also carries with it another «anagogical» layer of meaning. This resting-place reunites the mortal remains of these two deeply mourned daughters, Otilie and Frances, with their mother and father, buried together in this Reissmann family grave in Highgate (1880s-1910s), indicative of the hope of *eternal* family reunion in the heavenly homeland, the predominant hope of Victorian consolation literature in response to the tragic death of a child.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. Concluding Chorus

The choice of gravestone monument played a significant role in the *perpetual* performance of a good death in Victorian memory, as an integral component of «recounting a faithful life».<sup>48</sup> The piety, fidelity, and trust in the atoning death of Christ that a Victorian Christian typically strove to adhere to in life – as a continual preparedness for death (*ars moriendi*) – could be honoured in the choice of grave-stone monument. In this way a family's memorialization of a deceased love one in the «script» of a chosen grave monument – all too commonly the grave of a deceased child – could continue to present their loved-one's virtues as a model for the «audience» to the stage-set of Victorian Highgate Cemetery to imitate, in perpetuity, as a

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46 Juslin 2019, 317–318. «Episodic memory» refers to memory of personally experienced events.

47 Henry Reissmann chose to be buried in the Reissmann family grave in 1918 with his first wife and two daughters, although he had remarried (Eleanor) in 1908.

48 Riso 2015, 209.

form of evangelization. The affective power of this message could be further heightened by explicitly citing lines from popular hymns or more allusively sculpting their sentiment in stone, to multiply the senses of a graveyard's «audience» that may, potentially, be moved as their eyes, ears and heart recall a sacred song.

What of contemporary visitors to Highgate, the present-day «audience» of this extensive back-catalogue of sepulchral hymn-scripts, inscribed on so many of these Victorian grave-stones, either lyrically or visually? Has the «performance» of these sculpted sacred songs fallen-silent, rendered mute by a religiously and secularly diverse «audience» largely incapable of recognizing these verbal cues to memories their minds do not contain? Are contemporary visitors essentially excluded from the Victorian chorus schooled in the lyrics of Isaac Watts, Moody and Sankey and Toplady? Perhaps, for many, that is indeed the case. Yet, the latent power of these Victorian hymns remain, peeping-out from under the ivy of a half-covered grave-stone, to beguile its innocent audience of 21<sup>st</sup> century Highgate visitors to search the web for the fragments of that unfamiliar poetic line just uncovered. The intrigued explorer, the would-be «ethnomusicologist», is encouraged to search more deeply online for web-links of organ recitals or choral performances of these almost forgotten 19<sup>th</sup> century lyrics, beguiled like a modern-day Lomax, by the stone (rather than wax) cylinders, strewn across the burial-fields of Highgate, awaiting resurrection in performance.<sup>49</sup>

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49 Alan Lomax (1915–2002), a folklorist and ethnographer who collected, recorded and archived folksongs and music in the USA from the 1930s onwards.

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# Highgate Cemetery A City of Angels

Natalie Fritz

## 1. *An Angelic Little Girl. Or Starting an Emotional Walk through Highgate*

«The Angels wished a pretty flower to lay at Jesus's feet/they picked from the little ones a lily pure and sweet/our little child was chosen, and now she rests in peace.» This bittersweet poem is engraved on a tombstone erected on a grave for a three year old girl (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: *The melancholic angel: The tomb of Chloe Louise Anne Fowler, a three year old girl, in the Eastern part of Highgate Cemetery, London (Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).*

Above the weathered marble stone an angel figure looks down with a melancholic facial expression, her head resting on her folded hands, as she watches over the deceased child. Looking at this monument of mourning, one feels touched. Grief at the death of a child is universal, affecting everyone in every era. Yet here, in this particular example, the composition of poem and sculptured angel evokes a specific idea of how this particular family tried to overcome their little girl's death and tried to remember her; and this insight into the intimate process of mourning touches one deeply. The fact that her family emblemized the girl as a lily, taken by the angels to praise Jesus, indicates on a first level, that the remaining family members tried to cope with their loss by integrating the death of the beloved child into a greater and more meaningful concept, a religious world view.<sup>1</sup> Imagining their own daughter or sister living a <new life> in heaven, near God, can be a comforting act.

On a second level, the visible monument of loss, the tombstone with its composition of poem and carved angel functions as an instruction for the visitors as to how the family wants the deceased to be remembered: as an innocent girl, who was so pure and sweet that not even the angels could resist her. The emotional impact of the engraved poem increases in combination with the representation of the melancholic angel and vice versa. This tombstone can be found in the Eastern part of London's Highgate Cemetery, the part of the graveyard that is open to the public without booking a guided-tour. If you are walking through the cemetery as a tourist, a visitor or a mourner, you may pass this particular gravestone and the way it is composed may influence your vision of the once living girl. The perception of this tombstone is – of course – individual, as every meaning making process varies according to beholder, time, place, socio-religious context and so on, but the arrangement of the monument limits the range of possible interpretations. In the first instance, the beholder could interpret the angel simply as a guardian or keeper of the little girl's memory, watching from above over the physical remains, reminding visitors of her and, more generally, of human finitude. One could also interpret this human and female looking figure as a (prospective) representation of the little girl that has become an angel herself and watches, although with a melancholic touch, her family from above. In this sense, the

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1 On religious world views and their potential for creating sense and orientation see Stolz 2001; Geertz 1987; Pezzoli-Olgiati 2008, 45–66.

angel as a mediator between heaven and earth<sup>2</sup> may simultaneously personify a transcendent being as well as the human deceased, who is no longer physically present, but is now visually a heavenly resident. This interpretation of the angel as surrogate for the girl could be strengthened by referring to the poem, which is a derivative of a popular memorial prayer, that says: «God needed an angel in Heaven to stand at the Saviour's feet./His choice must be the rarest. A lily pure and sweet./He gazed upon the mighty throng. Then stopped and picked the best./Our child was His chosen one with Jesus (he's/she's) now at rest.»<sup>3</sup> The gravestone poem's definition of an angel relates to the practice of transferring <angelic> qualities<sup>4</sup> like high virtues or beauty to human beings, usually to underline their exceptional character in an affectionate and admiring context.<sup>5</sup>

To conclude this thought, one could say that the particular representation was probably made according to an order placed by the deceased's parents. It shows the deceased girl as her grieving relatives wanted her to be remembered. The representation produced by the composition of poem and angelic figure functions on the one hand as an instruction on how to remember the dear child: Chloe was «pure» – a quality which marks a pious being – and therefore was metaphorically taken «home» by *other* angels. On the other hand the mourning monument can be considered a memory «written in stone», a physical archive and is therefore also a part of the cultural history that illustrates how mourning, loss and death are represented in public spaces of remembrance in a specific time and space.

This paper aims to stimulate readers and prospective Highgate visitors to think about the ways our perception of an artefact – in this case, a tomb or mourning monument decorated with an angel – is affected by its particular visual design. Following an approach that draws upon phenomeno-

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2 Many different functions were and are attributed to angels. In the following paragraph we will explore their main functions in a short overview. For further information see Schmidt/Schmidt 2007; Krauss 2005; Jones 2010.

3 The poem seems to be very popular and can be found in diverse funeral card catalogues and on funeral parlour's homepages, for example: <http://www.funeralhelper.org/bereavement-child-announcement-verses.html>; <https://www.memorialstationery.com.au/funeral-wordings-Poems-for-Baby-Children.html> (accessed January 27, 2019).

4 «The personalisation of good (and evil) powers is a self-evident practice in the New Testament as it also was in its Jewish context. Through the representation of angels the pious of the Bible illustrates the secret of God's deeds» (Böcher 1982, 599, translation by the author).

5 On the use of the word «angel», see a standard dictionary definition: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/angel> (accessed October 10, 2018).

logical and anthropological image theories, we try to describe the representation's possible effects on the beholder as an interaction between artefact and human body.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the cemetery, a place of emotionally charged remembrance practices, the question arises: how do aesthetic aspects shape the way we remember? In this paper we will explore some of the angel figures that ornament the graves of Highgate Cemetery and take a closer look at the possible impact their particular representations may have had and continue to have on the beholder and the beholder's way of remembering the (un)known deceased. The sample of angel figures chosen are representative rather than exhaustive, with a slight emphasis upon less well-documented examples. As a consequence particularly well known examples, such as the memorial for Ada Beer in the Beer Mausoleum, an artefact that has been investigated extensively in previous studies, will not be considered in this paper.<sup>7</sup> The paper tries to encourage readers to think about the interaction between artefact, memory and beholder and therefore it seems to be more promising to look at less popular representations for further investigation, as the reader's prior knowledge of such artefacts is likely to be less developed. Thus, the paper is interested in questions of visual artefacts and their long lasting affective quality. This paper will therefore particularly concern itself with memory: the connection between collective and individual memory and how they interact with and relate to material culture.

Memorials have a distinctive purpose of guiding the beholder's view in a particular direction, to indicate a particular way in which someone or an event should be remembered. This aspect of memorial culture can be exemplified very well by considering the angel figures of Highgate Cemetery. Depending upon what function the specific angel figure was designed to fulfil, the aesthetic realisation was adapted accordingly. All angel figures represent, on a socio-historical level, specific religious concepts of the after-life and memory culture. On a more individual level they also represent so-

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6 For phenomenological approaches to 'images' (here the term is used following Hans Belting in a broad sense which includes virtual, material and mental images) which explain the practice of looking at an artefact as an experience of entering bodily into a discourse with the represented, see Bredekamp 2010; Boehm 2007; Boehm 1994; Didi-Huberman 2000; Didi-Huberman 1999. For the definition of 'image' used here see Belting 2001.

7 More information about the Beer Mausoleum can be found at: [http://www.mmtrusst.org.uk/mausolea/view/229/Beer\\_Mausoleum](http://www.mmtrusst.org.uk/mausolea/view/229/Beer_Mausoleum); <https://www.srf.ch/kultur/gesellschaft-aft-religion/die-traurige-geschichte-einer-familie-die-geschichte-schrieb> (accessed October 24, 2018).

cial status and power and are therefore enduring images of a particular practice of commemoration. The memorial (the term indicates its very purpose) helps us to remember someone or an event in a clearly confined way, one could call it a <canonised retrospection>. As a consequence, the act of remembrance can be characterised as a process that goes backwards and forwards at the same time because we revitalise past events or dead persons in our memory.<sup>8</sup> The memorial, tombstone or mourning monument in this sense resumes the function of a visible and material connection between the different time periods of past, present and future. Standing now in front of a tombstone – in a way – we think backwards, but, at the same time, the memorial has a prospective function because it is erected for ongoing generations. The crucial questions are: why do people ornament the graves of their beloved ones with angels? What impact do the specific representations have on our understanding of the deceased, the time they lived in and the relation between material culture and processes of remembrance, and the relation between individual and society?

To approach these questions, it seems useful to start with a short summary of iconographic types of angels and their meaning. Afterwards we will reflect on memory processes and try to understand how these processes are connected to material culture. To conclude these considerations, we will describe selected angel figures in Highgate Cemetery in a <thick> way, as Clifford Geertz would say.<sup>9</sup> In this way we will try to understand how the angel-figures function as material memory and how their representations instruct us how to read them. As a consequence we will also try to understand what they reveal about the society they were created for and about the <heirs of these images>, today's society.

## *2. Are They Feathered like Eagles? Or a Very Short Introduction to Angel Iconography*

Highgate Cemetery is literally a city of angels: there is an enormous quantity of different angel figures populating the area. Every single one is con-

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8 See Kierkegaard 2000, 3–4.

9 American anthropologist and ethnologist Clifford Geertz elaborated the term <thick description>, which he understood, drawing upon Gilbert Ryle's insights in the field of linguistic philosophy, as a hermeneutics of culture. In «The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays», his essay collection of 1973, Geertz pleads for a context-based interpretation that involves the level of production, distribution and reception. Geertz 1987.

nected to a specific remembrance strategy and visually communicates a particular message – as indicated by the Greek term *angelos* (ἄγγελος) that is used in the Septuagint, as a translation equivalent of the Hebrew term *mal'āk* which means «messenger».<sup>10</sup> Angels are thus convenient religious symbols that – depending on one's view point – offer differing meanings. As an attentive visitor, one becomes aware that every single angel type evokes a particular reaction, both cognitive and emotional. But why did and do people use angels as symbols on mourning monuments?

We find angels in the Old and the New Testament as well as in some Jewish and Christian Apocrypha and in patristic writings. In numerous accounts of the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha angels are described as heavenly creatures, who act as God's servants, as God's instruments to communicate with human beings. They are referred to as «sons of God» (Job 1:6) or the «host of heaven» (1 Kings, 22:19), characterisations that highlight their spatial and «emotional» proximity to God.<sup>11</sup> Only three of this multitude of heavenly servants are named in the Old Testament or its Apocrypha: Michael (Dan 10:13), Gabriel (Dan 8:16) and Raphael (Tob 5:18). But the existence of heavenly servants became ever more appealing in the New Testament period, such that these three archangels became surrounded by a huge quantity of other angels with specific abilities and duties. The patristic literature of the early Christian church – in authors such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *De caelesti hierarchia*<sup>12</sup> – developed a hierarchical scheme, to structure the angel population according to their functions. The iconography of these early Christian angels remains fairly consistent until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD: male figures, wearing a white tunic and without wings.<sup>13</sup> They are easily distinguishable from extra-Christian goddesses like the Greek Nike or other winged spirits like the

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10 See «Engel» in Kluge 2011. The Septuagint is an ancient Greek version (translation) of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.

11 See Schmidt/Schmidt 1981, 127.

12 The author of several theological-philosophical treatises, who, around 500 AD, depicted the celestial hierarchy, and who wrote under the pseudonym of «Dionysius the Areopagite», the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Athenian convert of St Paul (see Acts 17:34), (therefore also called «Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite»). Full text in English translation by John Parker from 1897 is available online: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dionysius\\_the\\_Areopagite,\\_Works/On\\_the\\_Heavenly\\_Hierarchy](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dionysius_the_Areopagite,_Works/On_the_Heavenly_Hierarchy) (accessed July 1, 2017). For a more recently published translation see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 143–191.

13 «Their appearance resembles humans (Acts 12:15) particularly white clothed and illuminated males (Mk 16:5 par.; Jn 20:12, Acts 1:10)» (Böcher 1982, 596, translation by the author).

Roman Genii. Based on the idea that celestial beings need to have wings, representations from the early 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards tend to depict winged, male angels. Until the Middle Ages this way of depicting angels remains the standard artistic convention (fig. 2).



*Fig. 2: Rome, S. Sabina, relief on wooden door, right side, about 430 AD: Ascension of Elijah: Elisha grasps the coat of the prophet (© University of Bologna/Fondazione Federico Zeri - Fototeca Zeri, Università di Bologna, inv. 2953).*

A notable contextual aspect of this type of angel is that these male representations have often been used – and continue to be used – to illustrate apocalyptic narratives: we encounter them as the ‘good’ – or even more accurately – the ‘angelic soldiers’ in stories of the eternal conflict against the evil forces (Rev 12:7–9); as the ones responsible for weighing the ‘soul’s balance’ (Dan 5:27); or as escorts of the deceased humans’ souls (Lk 16:22).

According to these particular functions, representations of such male angels are frequently integrated in religious architecture: they decorate the tympana of church entrances, supporting pillars or cemetery chapels and appear also as sculptures on fonts. All these representations remind the beholder to follow the right path, to believe in God, and behave like a Christian in order to gain admission to heaven at the end of days.

During the Middle Ages the representations of angels became more flexible and elaborated and new iconographies emerged, notably, the female angel on the one hand and the child-like angel or putto (cherub) on the other.<sup>14</sup> Representations of angels changed partly due to alterations in the practices of Marian adoration and worship. In the Middle Ages the human side of Mary, as opposed to the former distant and incomprehensible *«Theotokos»*, the *«mother of God»* or *«God-bearer»*, became more important – even though she remained the most special one amongst other women as *«Queen of Heaven»*. Artists showed her in contexts which were recognised as typically female and adapted her as a role model for the good housewife,<sup>15</sup> mother or leader. Presenting Mary as the *«Queen of Heaven»* the artists surrounded her – like human queens and noblewomen – with female servants and maids. Mary's celestial household became populated with female angels of a soft and beautiful appearance. These female angels impacted on the iconography that continues to inform today's representations – especially popular depictions (fig. 3) often shaped by Victorian archetypes.<sup>16</sup>

This popular type of angel is no longer awe-inspiring with a slightly violent, even martial trait, but softer with a more emotional impact as Nina Auerbach explains: *«Our present revulsion against angels as anything more than smirking inhabitants of Christmas trees may take inspiration from Victorian England, whose prevailing popular angelology cast angels as irrefutably female and by definition domestic, rather than as the striding*

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14 See Schmidt/Schmidt 1981, 134–137.

15 Interestingly, angels will subsequently become synonyms for the good housewife and her pious behaviour in the early Victorian period – women and angels will now become *«domesticized»* and idealised at the same time. See Brown 2001, 58.

16 *«Even though the iconography shows that angels are of androgynous appearance until the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Victorian artists link angels and womanhood visibly and allegorically in terms of an idealization of the efficient and obeying wife or wife-to-be. This connection was, on a social level, very useful to reinforce paternalistic hierarchy»* (De Girolami Cheney 1992, 243–244); *«In the Victorian era the artistic topic of angels was literally everywhere on postcards, in poetry, on wallpapers and on cemeteries»* (Garrett 2015, 60).





Fig. 3: *Kitsch: A postcard with a guardian angel watching over two small children crossing a wild river, EGIM srl Milano, Italy (Image: Natalie Fritz).*

martial and potentially bisexual males they had been.»<sup>17</sup> Therefore these female angels are often used to illustrate moments of the strongest emotions, greatest joy and most intense pain. We see these angels in various portraits of the deposition from the cross or supporting the dead Christ (so called *angel pietà*).<sup>18</sup> But they also praise, often gathered in groups, the expectant mother or sing for the new born child. As so called ‘soul bearers’ angels appear on Italian tombstones and mourning monuments in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> As – in this sense – guardian angels, they watch over humans (Mt. 18:10) and assist them actively to avoid trespassing the law and live a good life. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century they also become guides or escorts of deceased persons – a development of the soul bearer role that transforms the function

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17 Auerbach, 1982, 64.; see also Schmidt/Schmidt 1981, 135.

18 See Osten 2017 (1960), 601–621; <http://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=93200> (accessed July 13, 2017).

19 See Mendelsohn, 2012 (1907), 79.

of the guardian angel for the living into a continuing service that guides the deceased into the transcendent sphere of a specific afterlife.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 4: Klosterkirche Osterhofen: Putto (Cherub) with attributes of the Saint John of Nepomuk (RDK V, 473, Abb. 86. E. Q. Asam, 1732, Photo: O. Poss, Regensburg, AS 4824).

A little later, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century small, delicate and bird-like angels appear in Northern Europe (fig. 4). Because of their height and their delicate facial features, they were supposed to be child-angels. In Southern Europe, the putto (cherub) became popular at the same time. These angels are also small but often naked and well nurtured. They are playful and mirror the naive joy for life and innocence of human infants (fig. 5).

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898) was one of the most influential artists of the Victorian era, especially with regard to the design of angels. Many of Highgate's angels date from this era. He felt himself drawn to the immaterial and described his response to his context as follows: «the more materialistic Science becomes, the more angels shall I paint.»<sup>21</sup> Lutchmansingh explains that in Burne-Jones's artistic work «fantasy and imagination, in a symbolic mode, create a sense of enchantment, as the medium of an eman-

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20 See Mendelssohn, 2012 (1907), 78.

21 Lutchmansingh 1989, 123.



*Fig. 5: Gernsbach (Baden), last third of 15th century: Angel at the house of sacraments; the angels are feathered (© RDK Labor).*

cupatory potential, and generate the utopian hope of recovering the unities lost in the process of rationalist fragmentation and reconstruction of the subject under capitalism.»<sup>22</sup> Gregg Garrett adds: «Iconographically influenced by the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance they [the angels] embodied now Victorian piety in a specific way: Burne-Jones represented them as ‘dignified, stately, powerful, useful.»<sup>23</sup> Garrett explains that Burne-Jones’ particular way of representing angels in various situations and functions made them a popular motif for a variety of different media and times: «And impressively the artist showed these beings in their various functions as guardian angels, archangels and so on. Burne-Jones’s angels are not limited to the Victorian era but had an impact on the representation of these beings until the times after World War I.»<sup>24</sup>

Although the abundance of angel types in art is tremendous and we have only been able to touch the surface in this overview, nonetheless, we have been able to recognise some thematic and artistic analogies that link

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22 Lutchmansingh, 1989, 124–125.

23 Garrett 2015, 61.

24 Garrett 2015, 62.

all the different representations. Angels are not only regarded as messengers but also as active mediators (for example, as guardian angels) between heaven and earth, between the transcendent and the terrestrial sphere. They are, so to say, a perfect symbol for liminality on a temporal, spatial and a religious or ideological level.<sup>25</sup> Angels are not bound to our understanding of time; they are timeless because they are not human. We can find their representations made of marble or another stone in Highgate but they do not belong to the human sphere. As liminal beings between immanence and transcendence, they fight side by side with God against evil forces whilst simultaneously assisting humans in living a good life according to the commandments and finally guiding them to heaven. The eschatological and apocalyptic sceneries the angel figures appear in produce ideal motifs for mourning monuments that highlight either reassuring (fighting against the evil), comforting (admission into heaven) or emotional (angel as «substitutional» mourner) aspects.<sup>26</sup> Depending on what memory of the beloved deceased person(s) the bereaved wanted to emphasise with the mourning monument or gravestone, they chose a specific iconographic tradition and allowed «their» angel to be shaped in accordance with that motif. The angel figure then works on several levels as a material memory of the dead person(s): as a substitute for the deceased (figs. 1; 6; 7), because the dead person was «angelic» in the eyes of the grieving family; as a substitute for or addition to the mourners (figs. 9; 10), who are, as the angel shows, permanently grieving; as a monument of or a reference to a distinctive belief/a religious worldview (figs. 11; 8); as a means to communicate extreme emotions (fig. 8). This huge spectrum of functions is possible because by looking at these human-shaped figures we fill them with emotions – even though we know that they are not as we are. But standing in front of an anthropomorphic body or looking at a human-shaped face showing a specific emotion it is easy to associate with the feeling shown because we as humans express emotion in a similar way. As material repre-

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25 The term «liminality» is shaped by Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner whose thoughts are based on Arnold van Gennep's work on the rites of passage (*Les rites de passage*). Liminality defines the liminal status the participants of a ritual go through when they «leave» the «past» status and before they attain a «new» status. It is an ambiguous period, that serves to establish a new identity within a larger group of fellow men. See Gennep 2004; Turner 1995.

26 See RDK, Engel und Menschen (angel and humans), Engel als Pfleger und Bewacher des Grabes (angel as keeper and guardian of the tomb), trauernde Engel (mourning angel), [http://www.rdklabor.de/wiki/Engel#C.\\_Engel\\_und\\_Menschen.2C\\_Engel\\_als\\_Pfleger\\_und\\_Bewacher\\_des\\_Grabes.2C\\_trauernde\\_Engel](http://www.rdklabor.de/wiki/Engel#C._Engel_und_Menschen.2C_Engel_als_Pfleger_und_Bewacher_des_Grabes.2C_trauernde_Engel) (accessed July 12, 2017).

sentations of «beings in between the spheres», angels transmit in a very explicit way – as every «image» does to varying degrees – the inherent difference between presence and absence.<sup>27</sup> Maybe because of this specific quality, the angel representations sometimes function as stylised substitutes for the deceased persons or the bereaved, as Bredekamp explains in his *Image Act Theory*.<sup>28</sup> There he explains that the *substitutive* image-act depicts the exchangeability of image and body in situations where images are treated like humans (for example, in the adoration of Saints).

The following examinations of selected angel representations are based on a catalogue of over 100 photographs of angels taken by the author or her colleagues whilst visiting Highgate Cemetery. All of the representations analysed in this paper share the characteristic wings and female features prominent in the Victorian era and were selected to give an overview of recurrent types amongst the immense range of angel iconography in sepulchral art.

### *3. The Recumbent Angel. An Individualised Representation of Loss and Hope in a Public Sphere*

In our consideration of the range of angel iconographies and their use as grave adornments two key aspects have emerged so far: first, angel figures are liminal beings mediating between the temporal and the heavenly spheres and therefore may be used both as surrogates for the deceased and as a comforting symbol of a specific idea of the afterlife. Second, angels who function as mourning monuments mirror the deceased's status both within the family and within society.

A fascinating example can be found on the tomb of Mary Nichols in the Eastern Part of Highgate Cemetery (figs. 6 and 7). On a marble bed of realistic length lies an angel figure who is the height of an average woman.

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27 Concerning the topic of presence and absence within the study of images see Belting 2005; Belting 2001; also Boehm 2007, 33–55; Boehm 2010, 243–267; Waldenfels 1990, 204–224 and Bredekamp 2010.

28 See Bredekamp 2010.



Fig. 6: *The recumbent angel on the bed. Highgate East Cemetery*  
(Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).

The angel's features are soft and feminine and her eyes are closed. Her hair is spread on the cushion and her facial expression is relaxed. The tomb was commissioned by Mary's husband and their only son. The epitaph says: «The darling wife of Arthur Nichols and fondly loved mother of their only son Harold, who fell asleep 7<sup>th</sup> May 1909.» (fig. 7).

We do not know, if «fell asleep» is just a euphemism (even though it seems obvious given the time in which it was made) for «died» or if she really died in her sleep but the combination of representation and inscription is highly emotional. The tomb transmits at the same time the greatest loss and the deepest affection – even though we see no mourning or grieving angel here. With reference to Kierkegaard one might say that while observing this grave one revitalises or *gets back* one's own experiences of loss and grief and adds a new insight that finally transfers those experiences in-



*Fig. 7: The epitaph on Mary Nichols' grave. Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).*

to a prospective state, which is of a higher potency than before.<sup>29</sup> The beholder thus has paradoxically enriched or increased his or her own reality by reflecting upon it by considering a monument of a past time. With Kierkegaard one might say that due to the actual reflection of experiences the whole remembrance process moves the beholder into a quasi-transcendent sphere because it enables him or her to catch a glimpse of what eternity might mean.<sup>30</sup>

Also the setting is very special due to the recumbent angel figure on the bed which invites the visitor to interpret this representation as the deceased – especially in view of the epitaph. As we noted earlier, in the Victorian period the term angel was often used to describe the *ideal* woman, occupying herself with her family's needs and the household.<sup>31</sup> Against this background it seems sensible to interpret the angel on Mary Nichols' tomb as an idealisation of the deceased as well as a reference to her specific social status in a patriarchal society. As visitors we do not know if the deceased woman looked like the angel figure on the bed, but that is not the crucial point. What is important is the setting and the way the whole *image* is composed. There are no other angel figures in either part of High-

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29 See Kierkegaard 2000, 109–115.

30 See Kierkegaard 2000, 123–130.

31 See Auerbach 1982, 64.

gate – or at least none you will pass on the official tour – who are shaped in the same way as Mary Nichols' angel. The artist used a popular symbol of the Christian faith and put it in a slightly different light to recap the words of the epitaph and make the deceased unique. In this sense, this mourning monument is a very elaborate artefact because it plays with polysemy on several levels. On one level it shows a popular practice of transcending human beings – mostly in retrospect – by adapting specific characteristics of supernatural beings, to depict the deceased as an angel. This strategy works out on a social level by displaying to others the deceased's moral qualities.<sup>32</sup> And on an individual level, one may feel comforted, because by looking at the winged figure one may imagine her living an afterlife amongst other angels. On the other hand, the idea of changing an established mourning symbol slightly, reinforces its particularity, and thus anchors the image deeply in the visitor's memory. Following Aleida Assmann we could state that in this case, even though the representation of the angel figure is more personalised than in other examples, it's not so much the deceased that becomes essential, but the way her memory is «written or sculptured in stone».<sup>33</sup> We could say that this example shows how the bereaved ordered a specific representation of a beloved person, that thus becomes public and then becomes a part of an individual imaginary – that of the beholder's – again. The innovative transformation of popular symbols provokes surprise, de-familiarizing the familiar, and therefore endures in our memory – a desirable quality for a mourning monument or tombstone.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. *Angels and Repetition. Liminal Figures between Past, Present and Future*

As we have noticed by analysing the recumbent angel figure, the bereaved try to keep the memory of the dead person alive by building an adequate material «memento» in the cemetery which must be – so to say – ritually visited. Aleida Assmann calls this ritualised way of commemoration

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32 See Footnotes 14, 15, 16.

33 «One remembers what appeared to be striking, what left a mark, what was felt meaningful» (Assmann 2006a, 2). <http://www.bpb.de/system/files/pdf/0FW1JZ.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2018, translation by the author).

34 For the interrelation between power and aesthetic conventions and the effect of their violations see Schade/Wenk 2011, 121–125; Fritz 2018, 73–75; Frank/Lange 2010, 47–52; Berek 2009, 87–94.



«*pietas*».<sup>35</sup> The function of this practice is to demonstrate respect for the deceased person and to maintain the connection to a past that is fundamental to the individual's identity construction. Thus, this procedure is not only a practice for the honour of the dead but also serves as a technique of self-validation. The monument's dimensions, the material, the style, and the location within the cemetery all display the social and economic status of the deceased and his or her family.<sup>36</sup> The realisation of the specific grave is in this sense not only a posthumous fame, but also a future-oriented reference to the deceased person's descendants. Danish philosopher and theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, stated that remembering and repeating is the same movement in opposite directions: the process of remembering is repeating backwards whereas the actual repetition is the process of remembering forwards.<sup>37</sup> Remembering in this sense «brings back»<sup>38</sup> the power of the past due to the process of fetching it with the present's vitality and transfers this power into a future perspective. So, one could say that the act of repeating is an act of fetching something from the past and transferring it to the present and thereby revitalising it time and time again. Repeating is always connected with the process of remembrance – at least on a subconscious level – but does not remain in the past but links it with the present. Repeating therefore doesn't mean that a thing has been performed already several times, but the process of repeating adds something new to it.<sup>39</sup>

Repeating a specific kind of representation and adapting it to the current social conventions is also a revitalisation of the past by transforming it into a present state. Innovation happens by adapting a tradition to the ac-

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35 Assmann 2010, 33.

36 Aleida Assmann calls this kind of self-immortalisation «*fama*» and distinguishes the latter from «*pietas*» because for the *fama* the work and behaviour of the deceased during his or her life is relevant. His or her achievements can only be made public to a greater group but it's a form of self-staging as Assmann describes it. Assmann 2010, 33; 36–38.

37 «Wiederholung und Erinnerung sind die gleiche Bewegung, nur in entgegengesetzter Richtung; denn dasjenige, woran man sich erinnert, ist gewesen, wird rückwärts wiederholt, während die eigentliche Wiederholung eine Erinnerung in vorwärtiger Richtung ist» (Kierkegaard 2000, 3).

38 The Danish term «*gentage*» and the German term «*wiederholen*» both mean repeating and get back.

39 «Die Dialektik der Wiederholung ist leicht; denn das, was wiederholt wird, ist gewesen, sonst könnte es nicht wiederholt werden, aber gerade, dass es gewesen ist macht die Wiederholung zu etwas Neuem» (Kierkegaard, 2000, 22).

tual circumstances, the actual context.<sup>40</sup> If we have a closer look at an angel figure on a more recent grave in the Eastern part of the cemetery we will understand how Kierkegaard's thesis of repeating can also function on an aesthetic level: by adapting a specific iconography to a new context (fig. 8) the artist transfers the past – as a repetition of a specific visual strategy in combination with individual and collective commemoration processes – into the present and in this sense «makes eternity visible».



*Fig. 8: A small white marble angel stands behind a black marble memorial plaque. Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).*

The angel stands behind the gravestone. The gravestone stands in the foreground, and is as important as the lines engraved on it. Made of black marble and even though it is a small gravestone – compared to the older graves – lying directly on the earth, it attracts one's attention. It is shaped in a simple but classy way. The black marble is rectangular, like a plaque and

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40 See Chapter 10 about images «travelling through space and time» in: Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, 193–214.

engraved on it are just the name of the deceased woman, her birth date and the date of her death as well as the name of the bereaved person, who presumably gave the order to create the mourning monument in this design. The person, who no longer lives, remains the centre of attention. The angel is surely not an impersonation of the deceased, it is not naturalistic but slightly abstract. The angel is quarried of white marble, very simple and elegant. It is small but highly affecting because the angel has her hands folded on her chest right under the chin, a gesture we often see in Western paintings, engravings even films, and which signals a shocking pain. Even though we cannot see tears one imagines them while decoding the gesture. The wings of the angel are slightly open and entangle the body of the angel figure. There is a comforting sign that visually highlights the love the bereaved person felt for the deceased: the folded wings form a heart shape. In this sense, one could assume that the angel figure is a substitute for the bereaved who mourns intensely.

Even though this tombstone with its specific angel figure was erected around one century later than the previous example, it is obvious that it too adapts particular gestures of human behaviour in a contemporary artistic style, which have been transmitted by different media and remain part of our collective imaginary until today. In this sense this example shows that to revitalise or evoke feelings an angel figure on a grave need not be huge in scale, but simply touch us by representing the feelings that are usually linked to loss and death. Referring to Aby Warburg's so-called *Pathos Formula*, which highlights the effect of repeating specific visual tropes that are emotionally charged and thus work as cultural engrams, memory traces of past experiences that are part of our cultural knowledge, whose affective power functions in different contexts and times, these engrams evoke particular feelings in the beholder. These feelings are not bound to a specific time but are just human and can be classified, understood and adapted because they are *still* part of our shared human knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, this example highlights how tradition and innovation determine and shape each other and how this permanent process influences the collective and the individual memory, which is constantly altered by new adaptations of «former new images».<sup>42</sup> The «old» images are

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41 For more information on Warburg's fascinating work consider Wuttke 1998; Gombrich 1992; Diers 2009.

42 «Former new images» is a term created by Hans Belting to show how images are transmitted «using» different media as a sort of carrier. «All old images are former new images. Some images appear to be new because they use different media or

reused and, in this sense, are revitalised. They belong as much to the past as to the present and the future.

Accordingly, this new aspect may change the outcome of the repeated action and may therefore inherit a future related potential. Following Kierkegaard's thesis, one could depict the function of a specifically shaped mourning monument as a possibility for the self-staging of the living: they direct a glance at the past whilst visiting the cemetery. If the deceased person was for instance a mother and her grave is adorned by an angel escorting the dead mum into heaven, the beholder concludes that she was a good person and that her children – at least some of them – are good persons, too.

##### *5. Angel Representations on Tombstones. Visual Archives of Past Beliefs and Persons*

This leads us to the question of how individual memory correlates with collective memory and how the private correlates with the public sphere while visiting «angel-decorated tombs» in Highgate Cemetery. As we have already stated the mourning monument is not a private artefact, merely for the family members' contemplation, but, because it stands in a public place, it is also for public viewing. And the public, the majority of whom lack any acquaintance with the deceased person, need instruction on how the deceased should be remembered. The specific angel shape resumes this task by communicating visually a particular way of remembering the known or unknown dead. The individual memory becomes a collective one because at least some aspects that are ascribed to the deceased person are transformed into a material memorial and thus become part of a collective image reservoir. And this seems a perfectly logical strategy concerning memory, if we assume, that «people live within images and understand the world through images»<sup>43</sup> and therefore the practices of remembrance must

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react to new practices of perception» (Belting 2001, 54–55, translation by the author).

43 Art historian Hans Belting thinks that with a wide definition of «image» that includes material, virtual and mental images, it becomes clear that our world is a world built of images. We, as individuals, permanently internalise external images produced by other members of the society, which become our images, because we save them in our physical memory and then adjust new images referring to the repertoire we possess and which is collective. See Belting 1990, 9.

be a process of recalling ‹images›, that are linked to specific persons, emotions, places or events.

Around 1920 French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs described how individual and collective memory are linked.<sup>44</sup> The individual is indeed the subject of memory and remembrance – but he or she remembers in a *cadre sociale*, in a social frame. The individual thus has a memory that consists partly of his or her own memories and partly of the memories of the society. These latter memories are ‹historical› because the individual has not experienced them directly, but earlier generations of the society he or she is part of. And – to come back to the ‹world of images› – because the individual is socialised within a specific society that is built and legitimised by specific images he or she internalises the images that are important to the society he or she lives in. Hans Belting says that our collective predisposition and our individual condition amalgamate whenever we use images for orientation because we don't know where the ‹me› begins and the ‹other› ends.<sup>45</sup> The society establishes itself through repeating important images and building up a tradition or a canon. But the image repertoire can change with new generations, changes of power or with the use of new technologies. Halbwachs states that an individual and a society are only able to remember past persons and events that can be reconstructed meaningfully in the specific social frame of the reality they live in.<sup>46</sup> If no one is left anymore to narrate the story of the event or to tell stories about the deceased, one is hardly capable of recreating images of the past. In this case the memory just vanishes. Egyptologist Jan Assmann highlights that certain memories may vanish, memories that are part of a ‹communicative› memory which refers to a recent past and are mostly orally transmitted.<sup>47</sup> If these memories are not saved in any way, they vanish when the last witness of the event dies. A ‹cultural› memory by contrast, is fixed to a particular moment in the past, which is of particular importance to that society.<sup>48</sup> ‹Cultural› memory transforms historical facts into myths and different societies work out specific techniques to transmit these constitutive events, essential rules and important personalities: they elaborate ‹canons› of fun-

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44 See Halbwachs 1997.

45 ‹Unsere kollektive Veranlagung wirkt mit der individuellen nahtlos zusammen, wann immer wir uns *an Bildern* (genauso wie *in Bildern*) orientieren, ohne dass wir wissen, wo die eine anfängt und die andere aufhört.› (Belting 1998, 36–37, italic as in the original text).

46 See Halbwachs 1997, 390.

47 See Assmann 1992, 50–52.

48 See Assmann 1992, 52–54.

damental narratives that are transmitted by diverse means of communication, either orally, ritually, in another performative manner or through art. In this text we subsume under the term *images* the transmission and performance of such fundamental narratives, because every story – even if it is just told once – evokes images in the audience, mental images, which are transmitted and at the same time saved for later generations. But, these diverse techniques of keeping the past present do not all work in the same way. Aleida Assmann, states, that there are two ways of understanding memory: *ars* is the way of saving or recording a specific something in a specific moment like when we write a diary or save a copy of a document on a computer or in a virtual cloud.<sup>49</sup> We try to freeze the particular moment in a form that guarantees an absolute conformity between input and output even years or centuries later. Here we remember events, rules, persons based on accurately documented *standard narratives*. Maintaining the conformity means maintaining the canon. Interestingly, we do not necessarily need devices for this process of saving, even though we often use pens and paper, a recorder or a camera. Our brain is also perfectly capable of memorizing something like a poem or the lyrics of a song.<sup>50</sup>

The other way of understanding memory Assmann calls *vis*. This is the act of remembering – or not. The process of remembering starts in the present and tries to work back mentally to past events.<sup>51</sup> There is no absolute conformity between what was and what is now remembered, if remembered at all. Many memories fade away because they are not essential for the stability of the group any longer. In this sense, history is what individuals in a society remembered and transmitted. But, to highlight the important character of specific events or personalities which legitimize the actual rulers of a society, they try to influence and shape the memory of the collective by realising monuments, public spaces like museums and libraries that mirror a certain perspective on the past. An *official* memory develops.<sup>52</sup> This memory serves to underline the identity of a group, consisting of different individuals who feel associated with it. Thus, the act of shaping a collective memory has according to Assmann three reasons: legitimation, as explained already, delegitimization – if alternative forces assume power – and distinction. The last one serves to strengthen the bond between individual and society by declaring what is us and what belongs

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49 See Assmann 2010, 28.

50 See Assmann 2010, 28.

51 See Assmann 2010, 29–30.

52 See Assmann 2010, 138.

to us. Through memory, we realise, we become who we are. We construct our identity by integrating it into a temporal and social context which legitimises our existence and provides us with the required orientation.<sup>53</sup>

All angel representations work as an archive of a specific belief, a specific orientation that still has a certain impact on our present life, but some of them refer to explicit concepts which may not be known anymore. As an example let us look at an «angel holding a cross» representation we find on several tombs in Highgate Cemetery.



*Fig. 9: There are several angel figures at Highgate Cemetery that lean on a cross, head lifted up towards heaven as if they would promise a better life beyond the human sphere. Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).*

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53 This is in other words, what Kierkegaard tries to illuminate by thinking about the qualities of repetition: «Repetition is the only reality and the sincerity of all existence. The one, who wants repetition has matured» (Kierkegaard 2000, 5, translation by the author).

The tall, rather androgynous angel wears a long robe, like a burial gown, has long, slightly curly hair, holds a huge cross and looks heavenwards (fig. 9). The wings are half opened. It looks as if the angel's face has a melancholic expression. Is it longing for heaven? For redemption? That would mean hope. But does it look full of hope? The better existence after death seems to be a promise, but at the same time the angel embodies a specific form of pain, that affects the beholder. Maybe this feeling originates from the fact, that the angel holds a cross, in Christianity a symbol simultaneously of the greatest pain and of the joy of the resurrection. The cross in this case is a reference to Jesus –an *arma Christi*– and his sacrifice and is therefore linked to a specific conception of the afterlife, a Christian conception that was prevalent during a particular period – notably the Victorian age.<sup>54</sup>

The angel with the cross could thus be read as a means to transform or convey the deceased's or the bereaved's hopes for forgiveness and overcoming death into a material dimension. Because the inscription was overgrown with ivy, one could only read the head of the epigraph «In affectionate Memory». Thus one could assume that, during his or her life time, the person was willing to «bear his/her burden», lived a pious life and at the end will gain admission to heaven. Maybe one could read the angel's shape as female – due to the artistic vogue at the time the tombstone was constructed. But in fact, for our exploration it is not of great importance, we will concentrate instead on the effect the angel representation has on our perception. The pain one feels watching the angel may be a reference to the deceased person moving on and leaving his or her beloved ones behind: a temporal sadness with a prospect of solace. For the bereaved this would imply that even though one mourns, faith in a good afterlife provides the living with a glimpse of hope and eventually comfort. In this case, Kierkegaard's thesis would seem absolutely logical: by repeating ritually (visiting the cemetery) the act of remembrance in the present, the bereaved transfer the past event of death into the present and transcend it into a state of prospective hope.

Or, maybe because of the lack of a name and the time span between us and the deceased, as contemporary visitors without any personal connection to the buried persons in the cemetery, we perceive this sort of angel as a mere representation of the hopes and concepts of the society the deceased person and the bereaved lived in: a society that was informed by

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54 For more information about the meaning and memory function of the *arma Christi* see Cooper/Denny-Brown 2016.



Christian faith and its idea of an afterlife, in which death was not an end of life but a new beginning. In this case, the angel figure serves more as a validation of common concepts and of the bereaved as part of this society. The huge angel on the grave would in this sense be more of a public *memento mori* than a personalised statue for a particular person. The angel would, to refer to Assmann, work as a material archive of a specific world view and thus would keep the contemporary visitors at a distinctive distance from the deceased person.



*Fig. 10: The angel on the grave of the Wellesley Bell Family stands in front of a cross, holds a floral wreath in her hands and looks softly on the last resting-place of the family members. Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).*

Walking along the paths of Highgate other angelic sculptures come into view. There are angels that watch over the deceased persons with slightly

inclined heads, holding floral wreaths or garlands (figs. 10 and 11). These 'flower angels' function as messengers between the dead and the living, the past and the future, the individual and the public.

The angel on the grave of the couple Wellesly Bell (fig. 10) stands in front of a cross and looks mildly absent-minded but serious, as if she was contemplating or praying. Meanwhile she holds a floral wreath in her hands. It is a female-featured angel with long wavy hair and a long robe that reminds one vaguely of night gowns or Greek and Roman togas. The blossoms in the wreath resemble forget-me-not, which would be an explicit cue to the visitor, not to forget the couple. The angel in this case substitutes for the bereaved and mourns for them and does not forget about the deceased. One could say that the angel symbolises the inner and individual process of remembering brought into the public sphere. To push this observation a little further, one may say that this kind of angel amongst others is a manifestation of Belting's ideas about how individual and collective images amalgamate, inform our societies and provide us with orientation.<sup>55</sup>

The angel's relaxed position could imply that even though remembering the loss is hard, the pain lessens with time and this knowledge may bring comfort. While remembering, the feeling of loss is still there but less painful, because the process brings back the deceased for a moment and this effect can reduce the loss a bit. The angel and the gravestone as a whole do not appear to be a melancholic memory engraved in stone, but rather have a comforting effect. The angel reassures the viewers that the deceased will not be forgotten – even if there are no members of the family left to mourn.

In a similar fashion the angel with the floral garland (fig. 11), who is scattering a flower – a stylised forget-me-not (*myosotis*) – looks concentrated but not sad. The comforting effect is the same as in figure 10. Even if no one who has known the deceased is alive anymore, the angel will continue to remember. These angel figures do not function as representations of the deceased persons. Instead, they function as substitutes for the bereaved and their duty of commemoration. Even though the individual, living memory is gone with the death of the last grieving family member, the memory is transferred to a material artefact and therefore no longer a living but a saved memory. The angel figure serves in this case as a form of archive.<sup>56</sup>

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55 See Belting 1998.

56 See Assmann 2006b, 186–190.



*Fig. 11: This angel is scattering a forget-me-not, an explicit cue to the visitor. Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Natalie Fritz 2016).*

#### *6. Tell Me What Angel Decorates Your Grave and I Tell You, Who You Were. A Short Summary*

Due to space constraints we have only been able to explore a selection of the various types of angel representations in Highgate Cemetery. Nevertheless, we have realised that each of the angel types considered have specific qualities and affect us in different ways. Angels functioning as or positioned on mourning monuments were once in vogue (especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a certain romantic attraction to death was prevalent), then their popularity lessened until they returned as puttos (cherubs) and in more modern designs and smaller scale. This underlines the fact that individual and collective image repertoires, and the resulting attributed meaning of images, change over the years depending upon the values and rules a society is based on.

The more personalised the angels are – with additional epitaphs or characteristic visual references – the more interested we become in the fate of

the deceased persons and their families. It may even tempt us to reconstruct a family history of completely unknown people, just because we feel emotionally touched. The angel figure in these cases may be read as a visual representation of a specific benevolent characteristic of the deceased person, which the bereaved family wanted to highlight for the public and later generations as in figure 1. Or, one could interpret the slightly <personalised> angel with its heart shaped wings embracing its body, as a symbol of deep affection beyond death, as in figure 8. Also, the recumbent angel in figures 6 and 7 works on an emotional level and visually underlines grief and sorrow. But, as in figure 1, it also works as a strong symbol of hope, because it is connected to a specific religious worldview that promises the good in the afterlife. This is also the function of the more popular angel representations we described. They represent a particular religious tradition as in figure 9, which comforts the bereaved and at the same time works as a visual archive of a specific moment during the process of religious transmission. In addition to this function, the angels in figures 10 and 11 visualise and make explicit the function of a tombstone – they show the visitors that even when no one who knew the deceased person is alive anymore, the tomb with its remembering angels will outlast and encourage the future visitors to read the epitaphs and in this sense revitalise the memory of the dead.

To summarise, one could say that angel representations in some periods were more common than in others. In Highgate we have a huge quantity of tombs from the Victorian age adorned with angels. Many of these angels look the same and tend to represent a specific religious worldview – a specifically Christian perspective – that was dominant in this precise period more so than a specific person or a quality of the deceased. They are for today's visitors sculpted archives of previous forms of a religious worldview and societies and also of past aesthetic sensibilities. As a consequence we could say that we, as contemporary beholders, perceive these tombstones at a certain distance. They are more artefacts than references to real persons. But, the more personalised exceptions are eye catching – as we experience stronger emotional connections looking at figures 6 and 7 or at the Beer Mausoleum.<sup>57</sup> These angel representations communicate strong emotions beyond religious, cultural or temporal boundaries. And we could suggest that it is mostly due to their human shaped appearance expressing pain or comfort with which we as humans are perfectly able to

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57 For a 360° panoramic view of the Beer Mausoleum see <https://highgatecemetery.org/images/tour/julius-beer-mausoleum/vtour/tour.html> (accessed April 10, 2018).

empathise. Even though they represent a specific religious tradition, the affective potential is striking even for today's visitors. There is no distance anymore, the overwhelming feeling of loss and grief is almost tangible – all because an individual expression has been given to the angel figure and because a personal inscription accompanies it.

One can find modern adaptations of angels on tombs in Highgate, but they are not as popular anymore. Nevertheless, they either work as symbols of a specific afterlife – the angel as carrier of the soul – or express a particular feeling through their posture as in figure 8. As revitalisations of 'older' angel representations, they additionally transmit a tradition of representations connected to grief and loss as well as hope.

The polysemy of the angel as a religious symbol becomes obvious in Highgate Cemetery because of the different representations we are confronted with and which evoke diverse reactions in every single visitor. The setting in a public space, a cemetery, alongside other mourning monuments reinforces the polysemous aspect, because it also shows how visual conventions and ideals may change over the years and with this process new meaning can be created. The abundance of angel representations in Highgate Cemetery contains an immense reservoir of knowledge about religious traditions, cultural and social behaviour and power. Thus, we could conclude that the popularity of angels as grave adornment is on the one hand due to their polysemy and the emotional reactions their anthropomorphic representations may provoke in the beholder. On the other hand, it may also be due to the fact that even though these angels are made of stone, they can be read as a figurative connection with a transcendent sphere, which the beholder may experience her-/himself while remembering the deceased, death or life in general.

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## VI. Images of a Paradise Garden



# Requiescant in Pace Staging Nature as a Socio-Religious Practice in Highgate Cemetery

*Paola von Wyss-Giacosa*

## 1. *Dis-placing the Dead*

It is an eerie, bleak scene unfolding before the eyes of the onlookers: in front of the white portal of a church, dismembered bodies emerge from the dark ground (fig. 1). Gradually, the scattered limbs and heads join together to form new persons, but these appear to be randomly recomposed, intermingling parts of adults and children, of women and men, all wearing a jumble of clothes from different periods. Some of the figures seem disoriented, confused by the events, others, enraged by the sudden disturbance of their sepulchral rest, have turned against the person they deem responsible. The terrified man, depicted on the right-hand side, is pushed against the pillars of the building's entrance and tries to fight off the crowd with his tricorn.

We owe this somewhat disturbing, but remarkable small composition, hitherto unpublished, to the Swiss amateur artist Johann Martin Usteri (1763–1827).<sup>1</sup> Many of his drawings and caricatures represent moralising visual commentaries and observations both on the history and on contemporary every-day life in his hometown of Zurich. After Usteri's death, a close friend, David Hess, collected his works—over four thousand sheets—in several albums, adding titles, dates, and, at times, quite extensive explanations.<sup>2</sup> In the present case the caption informs us of a violent dispute that occurred in the year 1796 between the city architect, Hans Conrad Escher, and his predecessor, Hans Jakob Scheuchzer. Escher, we are told, intending to repave the ground in front of Zurich's main church, Grossmünster, had the mortal remains of those buried there removed and translated to another place, in an unduly confused condition. Scheuchzer attacked Escher for this lack of piety, not least because it offended him per-

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1 On Usteri's life and work see Ulrich 1990.

2 Kunsthau Zurich, Dept. Prints and Drawings, Inv.-No.: Z.A.B. 2609.14.



Fig. 1: Johann Martin Usteri, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, around 1796, pen and ink and watercolour on paper, mounted on paper, image size: 35 x 35,5 cm; paper size: 38,5 x 38,8 cm, Kunsthaus Zürich, Dept. Prints and Drawings, Bequest by Magdalena Oeri-Hess, Inv.-No.: Z.A.B. 2609.14 (Image: Paola von Wyss-Giacosa 2014).

sonally, since his own grandmother was among those so rudely disturbed.<sup>3</sup> Rather than showing the verbal confrontation between the two architects,<sup>4</sup> Usteri inventively chose to depict the forced resurrection of the dead.

The brief visual aperçu from Zurich—though this rather anecdotal incident never even made it into the local papers—is indeed quite valuable and noteworthy a source document. Beyond its historical and illustrative value it serves as a heuristic tool for further consideration in the present context, in that the artist tried to imagine and publicly display the distressed condition and the indignation of the dead being disturbed. In so doing he gave a visual expression to feelings, reactions and thoughts that did not merely concern one episode in Switzerland but must rather be seen within a much broader, European, context of new developments regarding burial policies, and, thus, of debates and ensuing changes concerning the position of the dead within the city and within society, in the quite literal sense of the space and place accorded to them.

## 2. *New Places of Rest*

The changing places of the dead, or rather *for* the dead, indeed offer a vast and challenging field of study, as does the notion and social expectation, explicitly expressed in the classic formulaic wish «requiescant in pace», of an inviolate, permanent rest, a calm and peace intimately linked to such places—at least in people’s imagination and hope.<sup>5</sup> Usteri’s composition may be seen as an early testimony of how, in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

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3 Hess’ caption reads as follows: «Im Jahr 1796, unter der Aufsicht des damaligen Staats-Bauherrn Escher, wurde der Kirchhof vor dem Grossmünster in Zürich verebnet und gepflastert, wobey viele Totenknochen ausgegraben, und dann, durcheinander vermenget, längs der französischen Kirche, wieder in die Erde gelegt werden mussten, was viel Gerede in der Stadt verursachte. Der frühere Bauherr Scheuchzer, auf seinen Nachfolger im Amte ohnehin nicht gut zu sprechen, ergriff diese Gelegenheit, demselben die bittersten Vorwürfe zu machen, dass er die Ruhe der Todten gestört und auch die Gebeine seiner Grossmutter frevelhaft aufgewühlt habe. Es gab eine heftige und höchst possirliche Szene auf dem Kirchhofe, zwischen dem alten kolossalen und dem neuen kleinen äusserst lebhaften Bauherrn, welcher letzterer immer bey Wind und Wetter mit einem Chapeau-bas unter dem Arm, im Winter mit einem Muff einherzugehen pflegte.»

4 A pencil sketch, also in the Kunsthau Zurich, Dept. Prints and Drawings, L 53, fol. 12, indicates that this may have been the artist’s original intention.

5 A collection of essays, discussing case studies through time, is presented in Jupp/Howarth 1997.

the closure of inner-city churchyards and the ensuing relocation of remains, time and again were the source of public uproar. Concurrently there is also, not surprisingly, a rich body of sources eloquently advocating and promoting the qualities of the newly instituted garden cemeteries on the outskirts of cities. One such document, published in 1865, some sixty years after the Swiss artist's drawing, but still bearing witness to the debate on burial grounds, stems from one of the largest European metropolitan areas; it is the first guide to London's Highgate Cemetery. William Justyne, author of this and other cemetery guides, writes:

The ancient churches of London—venerable relics of olden piety—which survive to witness the growth of this great Babylon, and stand like hoary sentinels in the midst of the surging flood of life that rolls along its echoing streets from earliest dawn to almost dawn again, were once surrounded by quiet grounds where the green grass nodded in the sunshine over the graves of the citizens. Those sacred spots were passed with reverence then! Now they are blocked in, narrowed, and in many instances have totally disappeared before the advancing tide of brick and mortar. They sturdily resisted encroachments, and long after the sunshine had been excluded and all vegetation gone, they were used for the purpose of burial. The unpleasant truth, however, that the city burial vaults and grounds were becoming so many sources of death-dealing pestilence, gradually forced itself on public attention, and at last became too apparent for even the respectable blindness of official routine; so after years of procrastination, and many violent controversies with those individuals which always impede a social reform, the solemn old places have been closed, and the advantages of rural cemeteries recognized by every class of society.<sup>6</sup>

While a reform of the burial practices is presented by the guide's author as imperative for sanitary and social reasons, when describing the new private burial grounds a strong rhetoric involving «nature» is noticeable, employed to emphasize the quality of the sites as peaceful and dignified, as aesthetically and morally uplifting, and, not least, as permanent.<sup>7</sup> Justyne in fact makes his booklet start with a brief description of Highgate's «many natural beauties» which «contribute many natural charms to this solemn region.»<sup>8</sup> The extensive passages on landscape in the guide and in several oth-

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6 Justyne 1865, 13.

7 See Rutherford 2010; Jackson 2014.

8 Justyne 1865, 7.

er publications on commercial park cemeteries recur conspicuously, as do those on the seasonal changes accompanying the dead and on the atmospheric qualities of such a natural environment. They are carefully orchestrated, not least intended to counter the arguments of those fiercely opposed to such developments. The «individuals which always impede a social reform» mentioned above, as official records show, obviously acted principally for political and economic reasons.<sup>9</sup> Still, they no doubt were also expressing sentiments such as the ones that had inspired Usteri's painting and arguing their case by denouncing the closure and displacement of urban churchyards as impious acts eradicating memories and places and violating the peace of the dead.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the design of Justyne's hardly coincidental green cover (fig. 2), featuring, on the bottom, six dignified angelic figures holding up a banner with the inscription «Requiescant in pace» and framed by a trefoil arch on columns, stands in clear contrast with the unsettling vision of the dead violently rising in front of Zurich's Grossmünster.<sup>11</sup>

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- 9 See the Metropolitan Burial Act of 1852, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1855/jun/08/metropolitan-burial-grounds-the-burial>, (accessed May 19, 2017): The Bishop of London, Charles Blomfield, argued that the closure of the parish burial grounds, particularly in the poor East End, posed increasingly worsening problems. Blomfield was also critical of parishes no longer having control over burials, now in the hands of private companies, and remarked on the significant loss of income the new system brought about for the clergy: «But the Metropolitan Burials Bill, while it operated with great hardship on the poor, inflicted another grievous injury upon the parochial clergy. By this Bill the parochial clergy were deprived of that which was the chief source of their incomes—namely, burial fees.»
- 10 An interesting source in this context may be Basil Holmes' 1896 publication on burial grounds in London, particularly the reference to the Disused Burial Grounds Act: «All the City churchyards are now protected from being built upon by the Disused Burial Grounds Act of 1888, but that Act has not yet been read to include the sites of the churches themselves which are from time to time removed, and which have all had interments in the vaults underneath them.» The same author, in a chapter on graveyards as public gardens, refers to Sir Edwin Chadwick's report of 1843, in which the social reformer wrote that a disused burial ground should be kept open as public ground. See Holmes 1896, 76 and 226. See also, more generally Warpole, 2003.
- 11 George Cruikshank created a disturbing representation of the burial conditions in London in the 1840s in his biting caricature «Enon Chapel – Dancing on the dead.» A corrupt Baptist minister had crammed thousands of bodies in a vault beneath the chapel near the Strand in London, resulting in a scandal that contributed to the burial reform. See Jupp 1997.

Despite the gravity of the concerns expressed by Justyne, it may thus be inferred that talk of the beauty and harmony of the new garden cemeteries—like the emphasis, in the quotation, on the disappearance of vegetation from the once «sacred spots» of the city churchyards—should not be viewed as merely descriptive or simply as a marketing device (though the commercial aspect was, no doubt, very important). Rather, it must also be regarded as part of a targeted argument, one meant to offer a sensible alternative to a practice that had, for a long time, seen the mortal remains buried in the proximity of their loved ones.<sup>12</sup> The prospect of their resting in the serenity of a commemorative garden, in the midst of what William Wordsworth had described as the «soothing influences of nature»,<sup>13</sup> should help emotionally appease this loss of a close spatial link between the community of the dead and that of the living. The new cemeteries offered a liminal space animated by the timeless quality of nature perpetually renewing itself; they created attractive public places, thus the implicit argument, in which the performativity of nature would help ease the pain of the bereaved, supporting their common hope for an eternal peace of the dead, while at the same time inviting visitors to enjoy the beautiful landscape.

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12 In a diachronic perspective, an observation on the concluding banner of the recent exhibition «Highgate Cemetery at a crossroads» seems worth quoting here: «People need somewhere close to home to bury their loved ones.» See [https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Banners\\_final-LO.pdf](https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Banners_final-LO.pdf) (accessed May 22, 2018).

13 The English Romantic poet's *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810) had a great impact in the Victorian era. See Wheeler 1990, 47–68.



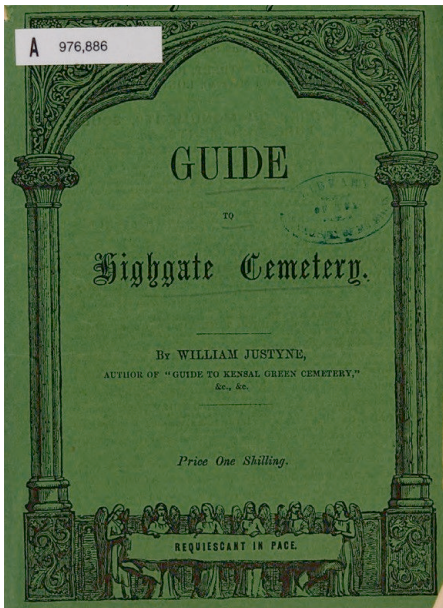


Fig. 2: *Guide to Highgate Cemetery, Cover, London 1865.*<sup>14</sup>

In what follows I will take a few select examples from Highgate Cemetery as a case in point, and focus on historical and current source material that presents and represents a particular performativity attributed to nature. I will discuss facets of the theatricality of the landscape, be it the melancholic atmosphere ascribed to it, its aura of wild, romantic seclusion or its role as a peaceful abode. Indeed, such talk of *nature* was part of a carefully chosen rhetoric already in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the cemetery was realized. It aimed at relating a specific, chosen space to a largely shared imaginary—whereby the term *imaginary* refers to a product of imagination, to a framework of mental and material images, to a common ground and dimension of society.<sup>15</sup> Linking liminal places such as burial grounds with gardens, it sought to carry forward such an imaginary as a whole field of action and of cultural, religious and social references. I argue that this strategy proved successful for a very long time—in fact, it is noteworthy that to this day the value of the cemetery as a con-

14 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015043572810&view=1up&seq=2>, Public Domain, (accessed May 15, 2017).

15 For an in depth discussion on the imaginary see Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015.

fined, yet public green space remains a narrative in its own right, and on many grounds, within the reasoning of the Friends of the Highgate Cemetery Trust, a charity founded in 1975 with the aim of preserving the historic ground for the public benefit and as a place of burial.<sup>16</sup>

It seems necessary, at this point, to outline more explicitly the notion of ‹place› used in the present context. In a highly regarded article published in 1996, the American phenomenologist Edward S. Casey observes: «*Places gather*: [...] Minimally, places gather things in their midst—where ‹things› connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts.» And he specifies: «By ‹gathering› I do not mean merely amassing. To gather placewise is to have a peculiar hold on what is presented (as well as represented) in a given place. Not just the contents but the very mode of containment is held by a place [...] a holding *together* in a particular configuration [...] a holding *in* and a holding *out* [...] a configurative complex of things [...] intrinsic to the holding operation of place is *keeping* [...] places also keep such unbodylike entities as thoughts and memories.»<sup>17</sup> Casey's characterisation of place offers a methodologically useful background for my brief considerations on socio-religious notions and practices linking nature and burial grounds. Moreover, to better understand this quality of «nature as a liminal place», one which entails the promise of peace and perpetuity, as well as the recurrent and intractable problems of the allocation and use of space, a diachronic perspective is chosen. This allows me to point out aspects of continuity within the arguments on burial grounds, but also within the transformations, adaptations and changes of Highgate until today.

### 3. *A Garden for the Dead, a Garden for the Living*

A beautiful spot on the outskirts of London with magnificent views of the city, one well known as a popular destination for outings, was chosen by the London Cemetery Company for Highgate.<sup>18</sup> The cemetery, opened in 1839, was planned by the architect Stephen Geary and the garden designer David Ramsey in the tradition of private landscaped gardens and executed in an area that had been one of mundane recreation and pleasure, a circumstance that was not without its critics:

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16 See <https://highgatecemetery.org/about/the-friends> (accessed May 22, 2018).

17 Casey 1996, 24–25.

18 Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, 2014.

Occupying one of the loveliest and most pleasant sites in the vicinity of the metropolis, and decorated by a profusion of flowers, and by showy bits of architecture, whatever may be its charms, this place, has certainly nothing of that solemnity which its purpose seems to call for. To the gaiety arising from the natural beauties of the scenery and prospect it might seem like churlish hypercriticism to make any objection; but instead of any attempt to subdue it, we perceive that pains have been studiously taken to render it prominent.<sup>19</sup>

Despite such observations, Highgate was soon perceived by most to emanate just the quiet atmosphere a cemetery should have while still appearing to be an open, inviting place. Its skilfully staged «natural beauties» were conceived to set the scene for individual as well as social interaction, for mourners and for promenaders. An early comment on Highgate seems to confirm the successful realisation of the project: «The beauties of the place, indeed, appear to be fully appreciated, for the gardens, as we may not inappropriately term the grounds, are daily filled with persons evidently enjoying the quiet, the pure air, and the splendid landscape.»<sup>20</sup>

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19 Companion to the Almanac, 1839, quoted in Collison 1840, 176.

20 The Penny Magazine, 21.12.1839, quoted in Collison 1840, 179. See also, on the recreational aspect, also intended from the inception, as a function of rural cemeteries, Penny 1974, especially 70–72.



Fig. 3: *Frontispiece of God's Acre Beautiful, or The Cemeteries of the Future, London and New York 1880.*<sup>21</sup>

Park cemeteries were a new proposition that had to be both dignified and attractive. They were meant to be perceived as positive on different socio-religious levels. The notion of nature, in this context, was used in reference to a landscape, to a garden, one that indeed was carefully planned and executed.<sup>22</sup> In remarkably long and learned overviews on funerary rites and places in history, the authors of several publications on the new burial grounds in Europe and overseas quoted, among others, old tracts from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries on ancient funerary cultures.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, the intention in introducing this historical evidence on landscape as a source of solace and pleasure to men since times immemorial was to convince people

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21 <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/hhdygx62>, Public Domain, (accessed June 18, 2018).

22 For further consideration of gardens from the perspective of aesthetics of religion see Mohn 2010.

23 See for instance Collison 1840; Justyne 1865; Robinson 1880.

that the idea of a garden as a cemetery was very old, ancient in fact, and mostly, that it was universal. For, if such a use was old and universal, it may persuasively be argued that the peace of the dead was not being disturbed, but rather recreated by those setting up the new burial grounds in nature.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the frontispiece chosen for *God's Acre Beautiful* (fig. 3), a volume on the topic published in 1880, suggests just that: The «Cemetery of the Future»—as the caption of the image reads—shows a lush parkland with antique-style architecture in the distance. Past and future appear to be merged beyond time in a prosperous place of eternal rest.

Some twenty years after Highgate's opening, Justyne, in his guidebook to the cemetery, was writing of a «holy loveliness upon this place of death, as though kind angels hovered about it, and quickened fair Nature with their presence, in love for the good souls whose tenantless bodies repose there.»<sup>25</sup> What the author, obviously quite deliberately, described on a general level and with regard to the overall conception, he explicated and further emotionalised in comments and observations on the atmospheric quality of single graves in the course of an imagined walk through the burial ground. In his description of the resting place of an infant in the West Cemetery, accessible at present only by guided tour,<sup>26</sup> many analogies are found that relate to nature: «Along this road [...] there is a beautiful little cross to the memory of Arthur George, infant son of Mr. and Mrs. Aston. It stands in the centre of a garden, where during the summer season the most exquisite flowers appeal to the heart with their delicate loveliness, and eloquently plead the fond remembrance of that little human bud so early plucked, whose name is recorded on the miniature memorial, and whose spirit is dwelling amid the flowers that never perish in the golden sunshine of eternal Heaven.»<sup>27</sup>

The single graves may—as Justyne's description seems to suggest—be regarded as miniature gardens within a vast funerary landscape, each in its own right a presentation and, at the same time, a representation of a mutual interdependence between the living and the dead. Each grave is a place, following Casey's definition; it holds together and keeps, in a particular

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24 The Elysian Fields are a particularly interesting reference, because they evoke both a Greek and a Biblical tradition, surely undergirded by a notion of Victorian Aesthetics.

25 Justyne 1865, 7.

26 The Friends are discussing periodical open access to the West Cemetery as a means to encourage return visits. See Exhibition banners, homepage.

27 Justyne 1865, 39. Such analogies can be found in contemporary collections of funerary mottoes. See Palliser 1872, 17–29 (section on the deaths of infants).

configuration, visible and tangible things, but also «such unbodylike entities as thoughts and memories.»<sup>28</sup> The individual grave does so through its position, through the tombstone with a name and dates, through its desolation or trimness, through an inscription or the visual representation of powerful symbols such as a rose, a lily or ivy, but also through the planting surrounding it, through a bunch of flowers, a candle or a personal object left behind.



Fig. 4: *The Grave of Caroline Tucker (1910–1994) in Highgate’s East Cemetery (Image: Paola von Wyss-Giacosa 2016).*

The bereaved as well as the many touristic visitors to the cemetery today, moving in the funerary landscape from one grave to another, are confronted with a complex, multisensory experience. On their walk they take in the scents, see the light effect in the trees, or a view of the landscape, by this bodily involvement establishing a multifaceted connection to the place. A more recent grave located in the East side extension of Highgate, where one can wander around freely, further exemplifies nature’s performativity.

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28 Casey 1996, 25; see also Assmann 2010 and Belting 2001.

The monument for Caroline Tucker consists of a statue in white stone on a pedestal.

It is the image of a young woman, in a simple dress, kneeling with rose blossoms on her lap, as if dwelling in a garden (fig. 4). Plants surround her, and the changing seasons time and again renew the appeal of the figure's tranquil beauty. Onlookers may read the inscription on the pedestal: the name, followed by the phrase «Darling Wife, Mother and Grandmother», and the dates of her birth and death, 1910–1994. The serene expression of the young—or rather ageless—woman, her peaceful condition, convey a sentiment of solace and indeed seem to have a strong impact on visitors; several photographs of Caroline Tucker's tomb can be found when searching for images of Highgate on the web. Taken over the course of the last two decades, in different seasons and from different angles, they are occasionally accompanied by a brief comment on the atmosphere of this particular place within the cemetery.<sup>29</sup> Caroline Tucker was over eighty years old, when she passed away, but the monument and the vegetation seem to suggest to onlookers that time is suspended for her.

Highgate's West Cemetery was planned purposefully, following the aesthetic theories of the time, pairing classical antiquity to modern sensibility.<sup>30</sup> It appears as a self-contained world, with serpentine paths and walks through copse of trees, time and again opening up to new prospects and beautiful lawns. But even in the cemetery's expansion to the East, which was done with no overall concept for the planting, nature, in its performativity, functions as a large area of reconciliation between the spaces of the living and the dead, and, more generally, as an atmospheric site for visitors and tourists. The two parts of the garden cemetery, both in their permanence and in their constant change, may each be perceived as sequences of settings with a strong semantic power; as symbols of a journey, the stages of which are marked by buildings and trees, by avenues, monuments, ivy and shrubs, by paths, tomb stones and flowers. They represent places of memory and remembrance, recounting stories of lives lived and offering spaces of personal reflection and collective emotion to visitors. Memorial gardens, in their overall institutional conception and on an individual level, were meant to serve as idyllic abodes for the dead and for the living and are as artful as they appear natural. Nature, in the rich socio-religious imag-

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29 See, for instance, <http://www.beckybedbug.com/2013/08/highgate-cemetery.html> (accessed April 24, 2018): «This was my favourite of the whole site. The woman is so beautiful and tranquil, resting within the plants.»

30 See Rutherford 2010.

inary it inspired, can evoke a faith in resurrection and a primordial, harmonious stage of humanity, and indeed, both in the conception and in the reception of graves, associations with Paradise, Arcadia and the Elysian Fields are frequent, as the description of the tomb of little Arthur George Aston or the recurrent photographic capturing of Caroline Tucker's funerary monument may have exemplified.

The succession of graves in Highgate—as it is documented in diverse writings and images or beheld in the individual and collective experience of visitors—can be interpreted as a constellation of images of nature unfolding. It can be perceived as a field of action, too, not only evoked, but also deliberately developed and staged through time, carefully reflecting and constructing, integrating, negotiating and deploying a many-layered cultural imaginary. Nature, in this context and taking up Casey's definition once more, may thus be understood to be an integral element and expression of what is presented and represented in Highgate as a place of funerary practice and as a historical site, and this, still following the American philosopher's thoughts, with an attention not just for the content but also for the mode of containment.

#### 4. «Not just a green park»

Highgate, as any other garden cemetery complexly staged, necessitated not only a clear initial conception by its creators but also instructions and rules for the users, so as to shape and control the intended performativity of the domesticated nature and, concurrently, to give it continuity. In the regulations of 1878, for instance, we read, with regard to the vegetation, that «all Grave owners desirous of turfing, planting, or otherwise ornamenting their Graves themselves, must make application to the Superintendent at the Cemetery or to the Directors.»<sup>31</sup> Another point in the booklet, in the section on charges for gardening, seems worth mentioning here: «The Company undertakes, by sealed deed, to maintain the decoration of graves in perpetuity, upon payment of a sum to be ascertained upon application to the Secretary.»<sup>32</sup>

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31 London Cemetery Company 1878, 7–8.

32 London Cemetery Company 1878, 18. Indeed, the Options Report of the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trustees of August 2017 mentions many graves privately owned in perpetuity (2.1. Burials); Baxter 2017a.



Current regulations have obviously been adapted to new needs, but they are still concerned with bridging the overall conception of the cemetery and people's individual needs.<sup>33</sup> The Friends of the Highgate Cemetery Trust, whose central goal and major challenge it is to maintain the memorial landscape, issue them. A brief review of some of the questions posed by the recent exhibition organised by the Friends, «Highgate Cemetery at a crossroads» (July 18–August 6, 2017), well illustrates their engagement and the complexity of their task, summarised as follows on the introductory banner: «Highgate Cemetery has been in use as a cemetery for 178 years and has now reached a point where important decisions need to be made about its future. Burial space is running out and maturing trees are destroying graves and memorials. Doing nothing is not an option. We would like you to help us find the right answers for the future of this amazing place.»<sup>34</sup> Several juxtapositions of old and recent photographs in the exhibition illustrate how the «original landscape», a «garden with clumps of trees and shrubs framing distant views of London»,<sup>35</sup> is now hidden by ashes and sycamores, how the enormous number of these self-seeding trees is growing out of control, endangering the surviving historic trees and the ecological value of the site as a green space and wildlife habitat. Suggestions are made to enhance the biodiversity through new planting and landscaping, enriching the visitors' experience and contributing to the «romantic atmosphere of the Cemetery.»<sup>36</sup> Another major concern is the future of Highgate as a «living cemetery»: «Visits by grave owners and relatives enhance the meaning of the place as a landscape of memory, and provide an important reminder that this is not just a park.»<sup>37</sup> With reference to other burial sites in England and abroad (such as the famous Père-Lachaise in Paris), feasible solutions are presented for the imminent running out of space, namely grave re-use.<sup>38</sup> The last central question brought to the public's attention in the exhibition concerns the importance, maintenance and

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33 They are found on the homepage of Highgate Cemetery, in the section on burials, <https://highgatecemetery.org/burials> (accessed May 22, 2018).

34 First banner; a pdf of all the banners of the exhibition, as well as a questionnaire, are available on the homepage. [https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Banners\\_final-LO.pdf](https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Banners_final-LO.pdf) / [https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Questionnaire\\_with\\_responses\\_web.pdf](https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Questionnaire_with_responses_web.pdf) (accessed May 22, 2018).

35 Exhibition, banner 2.

36 Exhibition, banner 3.

37 Exhibition, banner 4.

38 The Options Report of the FOHCT refers to studies on the ethics of grave re-use, namely the recent publication by Rugg/Holland 2017.

possible further development of Highgate as a unique site for visitors and tourists.

In his article, Casey remarks: «Rather than being one definite sort of thing—for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social—a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*.»<sup>39</sup> Taking up the phenomenologist's observation, it seems relevant to ask what such a place as a funerary landscape, might represent on a socio-religious level today. More specifically how might this question be answered in the case of Highgate, originally and intentionally conceived on the outskirts of the city but now, after almost two centuries, located within the urban centre? Is the garden cemetery an imposing example of Victorian funerary culture and thus primarily a historical site? Or is it rather a moralized terrain, a place of loss, despair and reconciliation, one of commemoration? Is it a religious or a secular ground, or is it both, a self-confined island of green and quiet and a liminal abode? Users of the cemetery time and again seem to engage in a dialogue with the place and with older graves in taking their decisions on how to lay their loved ones to rest. By the same token, the visitors to Highgate who come to see the graves of famous personalities from past and present advertised on the homepage of the cemetery seem to react and relate to the place and nature's performativity in different ways, even though they are probably not acquainted with many of the rich symbols from the original design, nor aware of many botanical, or other, references on the tombs. Still they may perceive many a detail and correspondence, they may be moved or intrigued not just by the «unique atmosphere of sublime melancholy»<sup>40</sup> but also by an arrangement of trees, by a seasonal blooming, by the recurring presence of certain plants and flowers, by an object left on a tomb, and decipher and interpret them on their own, contemporary terms. Places *happen*, as Casey writes, and therefore the spaces of the living and those of the dead meet time and again under new conditions.

In fact, in recent decades, some architecturally noteworthy new houses were built on ground that once belonged to Highgate Cemetery which was cheaply sold off in the 1960s to improve its precarious financial situation. These private residences on Swains Lane border the cemetery. Eldridge Smerin Architects designed one which relates to the very unique environ-

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39 Casey 1996, 27.

40 Exhibition, banner 2.

ment in many ways, not least through the name of the mansion, «House in Highgate Cemetery.»<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 5: Eldridge London Architects + Designers, House in Highgate Cemetery, Swains Lane (Image: Lyndon Douglas 2008, © Eldridge London).

On the architect's homepage we read about the building (fig. 5): «Each space benefits from an open terrace onto the cemetery and its wooded landscape.»<sup>42</sup> The architecture and design magazine *Dezeen* in 2008 reported on its position: «Unlike the lower part of the cemetery where people often go to see Karl Marx's grave, the upper part where the house is located is overgrown and largely unvisited allowing it to act as a stunning back-

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41 The construction, replacing a house built in 1970 by architect John Winter, won, among other things, a RIBA award in 2009 and was shortlisted for the Stirling Prize. Also on Swains Lane, two doors down, Dominic McKenzie Architects built Eidolon House, winner of the Sunday Times Home of the Year 2014. Between these two buildings, stands another house, named Valhalla by its current residents, who, according to their architect cut their plants in the shape of tombstones. It recently received a new facade using «traumatised wood, as dead as we could make it», proposed in 2015 by the architect Denizen Works. See <http://www.hamhigh.co.uk/property/a-deathly-feat-of-architecture-overlooking-highgate-cemetery-1-4691445> (accessed August 20, 2017); [https://www.dezeen.com/2016/07/26/valhalla-highgate-denizen-works-burnt-wood-cladding-modernist-house-highgate-london-facade/#disqus\\_thread](https://www.dezeen.com/2016/07/26/valhalla-highgate-denizen-works-burnt-wood-cladding-modernist-house-highgate-london-facade/#disqus_thread) (accessed April 24, 2018).

42 <http://eldridgelondon.com/work/house-in-highgate-cemetery> (accessed August 24, 2017).

drop for the spaces within the house.»<sup>43</sup> Several comments about the house on Swains Lane were made on the homepage of *Dezeen* following the article's publication, ranging from enthusiastic: «The creep factor is Fabulous!»; «The design is «Dead on»» to critical: «I wonder, [...] do the Londoners see this house dominating over the cemetery, where soul shall remain quiet. It is a very green area, but it is not just a green park [...]»; «Well do any of you know this place? I have lived in Highgate and used to visit this part of the cemetery when it was open for a few days a year. This is quite a sacred place. The house I love but the location—NO—it's to insensitive in this environment and imposes on the cemetery—how did you get away with it—did you bung the council or something?»<sup>44</sup>

Such comments, in their diversity, remain thought provoking in their own right, despite being over a decade old. They offer an additional background to the Friends' present reflections and considerations, leading back to matters of politics and regulation, of legal and moral ownership of the burial ground, and thus, importantly, to the issue of «requiescant in pace», to the changing places for the dead and to Usteri's painting discussed in my introduction.

When Highgate was first opened some argued that too mundane and recreational a spot had been chosen for it, one that, as quoted above, was not solemn enough for its function.<sup>45</sup> Around the same time, the first questions about the future of disused intramural graveyards were raised, about preservation of such grounds from encroachment.<sup>46</sup> Arguments were made that even if converted they should be maintained for the benefit of the public as gardens. Highgate today is considered to be a very green area, but as one of the comments on *Deezen* put it, it is «not just a green park.» This raises some persistent questions: which functions will such a garden cemetery continue, and which will it cease or adopt in the future? Furthermore, how will such decisions reposition Highgate in the constellation of images of a city that is outgrowing previous limits and borders and so challenging previously established spaces and places?

The impact of the 2017 exhibition is reflected on Highgate's homepage in the section «News». A document informs visitors to the page about the

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43 <http://www.dezeen.com/2008/10/20/house-by-eldridge-smerin> (accessed September 6, 2016).

44 <http://www.dezeen.com/2008/10/20/house-by-eldridge-smerin/> (accessed September 6, 2016). Mistakes in spelling and grammar have been left uncorrected.

45 See *infra*, 310/311.

46 See *infra*, footnote 10.

results of the questionnaire distributed on that occasion.<sup>47</sup> It was presented by the Friends as a request for help and may indeed be read as a call to the public to reflect actively on and contribute to future decisions and regulations, and, thus, to the happening of Highgate Cemetery as a place. Though the total number of people who filled out the form, 340, is not very high, still a trend in the answers can be made out that would want to see Highgate open and functioning in the future, both as a cemetery and as a historic site for visitors. The Friends also offer an update concerning the Conservation plan for Highgate that they are trying to put in place.<sup>48</sup> To tackle the complexity of the task, the elaborate option report proposes a subdivision of the West and the East Cemetery into seven and five «character areas» respectively,<sup>49</sup> and offers descriptions, reflections and recommendations as to their future. These considerations frequently involve, both verbally and visually, facets of the rich imaginary on nature developed and carried on through time. The coming years will mark new stages in the history of Highgate Cemetery and in the role of nature's powerful performativity in it, not as a mere object of aesthetic perception and of regulation, but as a central agent in the past and future happening of this place.

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47 [https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Questionnaire\\_with\\_responses\\_web.pdf](https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Questionnaire_with_responses_web.pdf) (accessed May 22, 2018).

48 Baxter 2017b.

49 Character areas are «broadly defined as areas within which the prevailing character is distinct from adjacent areas in terms of topography, landscape design, planting, and built form (including character of memorials) or a combination thereof.» Baxter 2017a, Highgate Cemetery Option Report 1.

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# Animal, Vegetable or Mineral? Performativity of Living Images in Highgate Cemetery

*Ann Jeffers*

The main object of a burial ground is [...] the disposal of the remains of the dead in such a manner as that their decomposition, and return to the earth from which they sprung, shall not prove injurious to the living; either by affecting their health or schooling their feelings, opinions, or prejudices. A secondary object is, or ought to be improvement of moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and more especially of the great masses of society [...]. Churchyards and cemeteries are scenes not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches to cultivate the intellect, but they serve as historical records [...]. The tomb has, in fact, been the chronicler of taste throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

The most overwhelming experience of walking in Highgate Cemetery is the perception of nature in a variety of forms: the landscape itself with its variety of trees, shrubs and wild flowers and their equally varied visual representations on the Victorian gravestones as flora, fauna and minerals. This paper considers selected representations of nature in Highgate Cemetery sensitive to Victorian artistic conventions. If Judith Butler is correct when she writes that performativity «does not merely refer, but acts in some way to constitute that which it enunciates»,<sup>2</sup> a study of the construction of meaning in the imagery of the gravestones needs to investigate a number of strands. The socio-historical context of the creation of Victorian cemeteries constitutes an important layer of meaning, as well as the multiple imaginaries at play behind the creation of «garden cemeteries». Allied to this, the explicit interplay between sanitation reform of the nineteenth

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1 Loudon 1843, 1, 13. John Claudius Loudon was influenced by John Strang who wrote that «a garden cemetery and monumental decoration [...] are not only beneficial to public morals, to the improvement of manners, but are likewise calculated to extend virtuous and generous feelings [...] a garden cemetery is the sworn foe to superstition» (Strang 1831, 58–59, 69).

2 Butler 2011, 218.

century and aesthetics gives rise to a new connection of art related to death. Finally, exploring emblematic meaning of flora and fauna as imaged in the cemetery will help us to understand how these images perform in the context of burial practices.

### 1. *The Socio-Historical Context of Victorian Garden Cemeteries*

While the creation of cemeteries is a Victorian innovation, their historical and imaginary conceptualisation goes back culturally to the classical period. To give a full history of these developments does not fall within the remit of this paper, but it is enough to say that three strands intertwine to construct a meaning of cemeteries as a dwelling place of rest: the biblical idea of the garden of Eden (and the garden in the *Song of Songs*), the Elysian fields and Arcadia.<sup>3</sup> The catalyst for the Victorian connection of a garden with commemoration of the dead comes from eighteenth century garden architects who proposed a model of landscaped gardens, adorned with monuments and sculpture whose function was to commemorate the dead.<sup>4</sup> The word ‘cemetery’ itself means ‘sleeping place’<sup>5</sup> and suggests an image of restful peace, far removed from the charnel-houses of nineteenth century England before the Burial reforms mid-century. Garden-cemeteries generally exhibit a fusion of neo-classicism and gothic styles. In fact the latter became associated more closely with Christianity as a whiff of ‘paganism’ tended to be associated with neo-classicism.<sup>6</sup>

Another important factor in the emergence of the new conceptualisation of the garden-cemetery as a place of reflection on transience, impermanence, love and fame is the work of the Graveyard poets,<sup>7</sup> and in particular Edward Young, *The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* published in 1742. His encouragement to aspire to the ‘good

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3 The most important study of the genesis of garden cemeteries can be found in Curl 2000. See also Rutherford 2008.

4 Notably Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld, *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (1779–1785) and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature* (1776); see Curl 2000, 17–18.

5 Gillon 1972, vii.

6 Augustus Pugin famously argued in *Contrasts* (1834) that the Gothic style is adopted as Christian architecture, cited in Curl 2000, 86.

7 The most famous graveyard poems were Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1743), Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1750) and most important of all, Edward Young’s nine volumes *The Complaint* (1742–1745). See also Niels Penke’s contribution to this book.

death through the exercise of Christian virtues, as well as his exploration of the relationships between nature, reality and God,<sup>8</sup> set the standard for thinking about death for the next century at least. This romanticisation of death is mirrored in paintings and sermons where death-bed scenes are given prominence, with repentance and forgiveness as a primary focus, moving away from final judgement scenes and depictions of Hell of an earlier period.<sup>9</sup> Heaven becomes a happy place where families will be reunited.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Nineteenth Century Sanitation Reform and Aesthetics

While there is no doubt that there is a long tradition behind the conceptualisation of the garden cemetery, the impetus came from the appalling conditions in urban centres that prevailed in intra-mural church graveyards. *The Times*, on 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1846 declared that Chadwick «[h]ad accumulated and epitomised a mass of evidence of such a revolting nature, that the wonder was that so frightful a practice could have been so long tolerated. [...] The bodies were piled [...] until they reached a depth of 10, 20, and 30 feet, the topmost body being only a few inches from the surface [...] The putrescence accumulation raised every churchyard in London an average 10 feet high [...]»<sup>11</sup>

The sanitary reforms themselves coincided with the evangelical revival with its agenda of «ameliorism»: moral improvement was understood to be key to a vision of a «clean» world, giving rise to the «sanitary gospel» and the association of sanitation with virtue.<sup>12</sup> However it would be a mistake to divorce or limit the discourse on sanitation from aesthetic concerns: John Claudius Loudon himself, one of the most prominent landscape architects at the time, was clear that the dominant models of (visual) sense perception inherited from the 18<sup>th</sup> century needed to be actively displaced in order to make way for the sanitary aesthetic.<sup>13</sup> A more holistic understanding

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8 Curl 2000, 5.

9 Pat Jalland gives William L. Walton's depiction of *Albert's Death* (1862) and *Fading Away* (1858) by Henry Peach Robinson as examples of the «good death». See Jalland 1996, 40.

10 Jalland 1999, 236.

11 Quoted in Herman 2010, 307.

12 Brown 2013, 16.

13 The Victorian era attempted to redefine taste as a mechanism of public health and social justice: see Cleere 2014, 9. These developments are especially clear in Chadwick's report of 1846 and in John Ruskin's work who sanitised Victorian aesthetics in *Modern Painters* in 1843.

of beauty thus submitted visual values to the smell test.<sup>14</sup> Hence the importance of implementation of the burial reform: urban space where the living and the dead cohabited put Londoners at risk from graveyard «miasma»,<sup>15</sup> with corpses of the poor often kept at home until the cost of the funeral was met.

All these strands contribute to the creation of an «ethicohygienic space.»<sup>16</sup> This expression is very useful to help us explore the performativity of burial places as spaces which need to suggest «a specialisation of virtue».<sup>17</sup> The implementation of the «right» kind of conduct is provided by the general setting of cemeteries as «gardens», and by the visual «emblems» found on the gravestones. The meaning of «emblem»<sup>18</sup> emerges through an interplay between title, motto and visual image, to which is often added a prose commentary. The focus on the object is to draw spectators into visual representation and involve them emotionally. In this context, the realm of nature is read symbolically. Animals, flowers and minerals are understood to provide educational lessons. This is made explicit in numerous writings, poetry, sermons and critical essays on art as the work of John Ruskin exemplifies.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. *Victorian Emblems: Flowers as Women's Emblems*<sup>20</sup>

Thus musing in a garden nook  
Each flower is as a written book.

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14 Kant encapsulates eighteenth century aesthetic sensibility: «Which organic sense is the most ungrateful and also seems the most dispensable? The sense of *smell*» (Kant 2006 (1798), 50, italics in original).

15 «The sense of smell in the majority of the inhabitants seems to be destroyed, and having no perception even of stenches which are insupportable to strangers, they must be unable to note the excessive escapes of miasma as antecedents to disease, [...] olfactory reform of the poor was [...] intimately linked with their moral reform.» Chadwick in his *Sanitary Report* cited in Curl 2000, 5.

16 Brown 2013. This term is coined by Osborne/Rose 1999, 741.

17 Brown 2013, 12–13.

18 For a comprehensive analysis and history of the use of emblems see Manning 2004.

19 In the *Eagle's Nest* for instance, John Ruskin speaks about birds providing educational lessons (102, 113, 156, 169); see also *Proserpina* for his thoughts on flowers as «emblems» and *Deucalion* on geology.

20 To explore this concept of «emblem» and its implications for reading representations of flowers, see Höltgen 1986.

And rich the stores of holy thought  
That by these blossoms fair are brought.  
Flowers are the gems that children love,  
Yesterday men delight to see,  
And they bring a thousand memories  
Of by-gone days to me!<sup>21</sup>

There is a long history of the association of women with nature and in particular with flowers<sup>22</sup> but this crystallised during the Victorian period when fragility, size and impermanence were seen to be a common denominator of women and flowers. These stereotypical associations regarding love (and the lack of) and death dominated the lives of Victorian women:<sup>23</sup>

The hand of affection twines the rosy wreath for the brow of the fair  
bride;  
and the cherub child, who passes away to the spirit-land,  
bears on its blossom, to its silent resting place,  
as the last sad offering of love,  
a stainless flowers, - fit emblem to its unsullied purity.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, a discussion of the meaning of flora, fauna and minerals needs to take account of the emergence of 'natural theology' during the course of the nineteenth century,<sup>25</sup> a set of ideas inherited from the eigh-

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- 21 A poetic variation on Mary Howitt's *Holy Flowers* quoted in Adams 1864: 31–34. For more detail on Victorian flower 'emblems' in poetry and art see Phillips 1825.
- 22 See Seaton 1995. The most popular of all English language flower books is Frederic Shoberl's *The Language of Flowers; with illustrative poetry* (1839). The interest in biblical lands in the nineteenth century gave rise to a number of influential books about Bible plants combining religious, literary, historical and botanical concerns e.g. *The Scripture Garden Walk* (1832), Marian Callcott, *A Scripture Herbal* (1842) and Henry Osborn, *Plants of the Holy Land* (1861). This mirrors the interest in botany in the ancient world with studies of flowers in Homer and Vergil, and in England, a substantial literature on Milton and Shakespeare, Tennyson and Burns. See for instance: Henry N. Ellacombe, *Plant-Lore and Garden Craft of Shakespeare* (1878).
- 23 There are numerous books on the language of flowers. Here are some of the most important: Anne Pratt, *Flowers and Their Associations* (1840), Robert Tyas, *Favourite Field Flowers; or, Wild Flowers of England Popularly Described* (1848–1850).
- 24 Anna Elizabeth in *Vase of Flowers* (1851), quoted in Seaton 1985, 7.
- 25 Natural theology might be traced to Jean-Jacque Rousseau and Alexander Pope (see his *Essay on Man* of 1733); see Scourse, 1983, 10, 49, 50, 53. William Paley popularises the idea at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Scourse 1983, 50).

teenth century romantic view of nature.<sup>26</sup> Ruskin is a well-known proponent of this idea,<sup>27</sup> making explicit connections between the observation, and enjoyment of the natural world with an intellectual and spiritual appreciation of God's creation. This is explored in a number of publications, including *Proserpina* on flowers, *Love's Meinie* on birds and *Deucalion* on geology.<sup>28</sup> *Proserpina* is especially relevant here as its title alludes to the nature of the goddess who returns from the dead. O'Gorman sees in this image an invitation to the reader (and viewer) to see in every season a «renewal of nature, the ceaseless energy of the natural world, its perpetual capacity to restore life, like an endlessly recurrent resurrection.»<sup>29</sup> The durability of the shoot and wood strikes Ruskin as «a manner of immortality, or at least usefulness after death.»<sup>30</sup> Ruskin, by combining art, science and religious spiritualism articulates the Christian hope of the soul's immortality.

The nineteenth century embraces natural theology in a variety of ways, and is expressed in particular in the popularity of «Flower preaching.» «Flower preaching» as an expression of Victorian religious life draws clear associations between the spiritual life of Christ symbolised by the wonders of the natural world, in particular flowers.<sup>31</sup> This theme is explored at length in all the language of flower books I have looked at. There are many examples of primary associations with morality and social conventions as the following poem by Christopher Smart shows:

For there is no Height in which there are not flowers.  
For flowers have great virtues for all the senses.  
For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.  
For flowers have their angels even the words of God's creation.  
For the warp and woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits,

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26 See Scourse 1983.

27 See O'Gorman, 2015. Ruskin's contribution cannot be underestimated: he inaugurated an aesthetic founded on a direct engagement with the natural world while showing how art is a civilising influence. See Wildsmith 2000; Hewison 1993; Landow 1993.

28 O'Gorman 2010.

29 O'Gorman 2010, 284; see also Seaton 1985.

30 Ruskin 1886, 25:328–329.

31 See for instance the Free Church of Scotland minister Hugh Macmillan: «there is not a leaf, nor a flower, nor a dewdrop, but bears His image» (Macmillan 1867, vi).

For flowers are good both for the living and the dead.  
For here is a language of flowers.  
For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers.<sup>32</sup>

Flowers are seen as civilising and carry with them associations of virtuous lives.<sup>33</sup> While this is not a new idea, but stretches as far back as the gardens of Eden and the *Song of Songs* in the biblical world, through Roman times with Ovid and medieval associations of flowers with Mary for instance, the language of flowers acquires new impetus during the nineteenth century sanitary reforms. Kant's prioritisation of the visual gave way to the prioritisation of smell, which I suggest might be one of the criteria in choosing flowers as emblems on gravestones. The visual experience of a scented flower is enhanced by the memory of its perfume, and by its intellectual, moral and spiritual associations thus contributing to a full-body performance.

### 3.1 Rose

Representations of roses are ubiquitous in the Victorian cemetery (fig. 1). Its symbolic importance cannot be underestimated given its association with love and pleasure since classical times. Roses were cultivated in the medieval enclosed garden for their association with Mary and in their red variety with Christ's passion. Its religious meaning became secularised by the eighteenth century, an era which looked for new ways of using flowers to represent human concerns. The association of roses with Romantic and Graveyard poets built up associations with the pleasure and sorrow of ruins. Allied with this, Linnaeus's classification of flowers based on their sex-

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32 Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*, Fragment B 492–512, quoted in Branch 2006, 168.

33 See a number of examples and further bibliography in Seaton 1995, 35–36. Rose Porter, *The Story of a Flower and Other Fragments Twice Gathered* (1883) is a collection of short stories where flowers save souls, often portrayed in the hand of a dying and repentant sinner. These stories are common also in women's periodical press and in literature for children. Flowers can recall a lost soul to its better self, or unite lovers or influence someone to lead a sanctified life. On literature for Sunday school American children see Alcott 1855, 25: «through this simple Flower we will keep the child pure and stainless amid the sin and sorrow around her. The love of this shall lead her on through temptation and through grief, and she shall be a spirit of joy and consolation to the sinful and the sorrowing.»

ual differentiation further contributed to a change in the status of flowers. Roses are seen as representing ephemeral beauty, love and virtue:

Roses ephemeral beauty, love,  
thou art all that's lovely, innocence,  
simplicity, I am worthy of you  
Crown of roses, recompense for virtue.<sup>34</sup>

Another poem from popular literature alludes to virtues of peace and faithfulness:

But when thy Roses came to me,  
My sense with their deliciousness was spell'd;  
Soft voices had they-that with tender plea,  
Whispered of peace, and truth, and constancy unequal'd.<sup>35</sup>



Fig. 1: Rose Emblem, Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

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34 Saunders 1999, 190–193. Saunders reproduces *The Book of Memory* by Fanny Robinson (1802–1872) with illustrations. Each illustration is accompanied by a poem.

35 Burke 1856, 23.



### 3.2 *Ivy*<sup>36</sup>

Ivy is another plant which is often represented on gravestones. In the language of flowers, Ivy is associated with friendship, reciprocal tenderness, fidelity in friendship, and constancy in matrimony. This plant was already given in ancient Greece to a newly-wed couple and becomes the symbol of women's love and constancy in the Victorian period. Shoberl, author of one of the most influential books on the language of flowers illustrates this when he quotes the following:

«Nothing can separate it from the tree which it has once embraced: it clothes it with its own leaves in that inclement season when its dark boughs are covered with hoar-frost. The faithful companion of its destiny, it falls when the tree is cut down: death itself does not release its grasp, and it continues to adorn its verdure to the dry trunk which once supported it.»<sup>37</sup>

### 3.3 *Lilies*<sup>38</sup>

In pre-Christian times, lilies are associated with fertility or royalty, making an easy transition to religious concepts (fig. 2). White lilies have been associated with Mary since the medieval period when white was seen as the colour of purity, it is this latter meaning which prevails most on gravestones. However, the emblematic meaning of flowers is not limited to a single set of meanings as Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* demonstrates:

Pink Hawthorne and the pastoral Eglantine,  
Fast fading Lilies and broad spreading Leaves,  
Fair May's bright garland,  
But lovely things are fleeting- Spring's sweet flow'rs  
Are fugitive- and swifter still than these  
Will love dissolve into forgetfulness.

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36 Saunders 1999, 180–181. Ivy was well-attested on ancient Jewish tombs: see Crewe 2009, 26–28.

37 Shoberl 1839, 31.

38 Saunders 1999, 182–183.

In this poem, Keats warns of the transience of life. However, the lily also has a biblical antecedent in «the lilies of the field»<sup>39</sup> which gave rise to the following:

Art thou that «Lily of the field»,  
Which, when the Saviour sought to shield  
The heart from blank despair,  
He showed to our mistrustful kind,  
An emblem of the thoughtful mind,  
Of God's paternal care?<sup>40</sup>



*Fig. 2: Lily Emblem, Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).*

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39 Gospel of Matthew 6:28.

40 Shoberl 1839, 86.

### 3.4 *Poppies*

Another flower which appears on gravestones is the poppy: this illustrates well the natural theology of the time. As the earth goes through seasonal cycles, the poppy is a reminder of continuing hope in the midst of transience.

Life is like a furrowed field, methinks the Poppies say,  
Broadcast sown with care and grief, which spring up day by day,  
But ever there, mid crops of care, some bright-hued joy appears,  
To teach that men should hope again, for smiles amid their tears.  
White emblem of sleep.  
Red is consolation.<sup>41</sup>

The cycle of elements displayed in plant death, decay and reappearance in another guise forms the basis of botano-theology.<sup>42</sup> Even decay has a moral design: «Thus it has pleased Providence to display further diversity of power [...] that even in this world the general destroyer Death is controlled and bound by the will of the great Ordainer.»<sup>43</sup>

## 4. *Victorian Emblems: Animals*

Alongside flowers, another common emblem is the representation of animals. Although there is a great variety of animal «emblems» I have selected some of the most representative.

### 4.1 *Peacock*

The use of peacock imagery goes back to antiquity: a symbol of beauty and glory, it becomes associated with Christianity as an image of God's omniscience. Aristotle's view that peacock's flesh does not rot gave rise to its association with immortality<sup>44</sup> and their medieval iconography associates them with baptism and spiritual rebirth.<sup>45</sup>

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41 Miller 1847, 88.

42 Scourse 1983, 58.

43 Scourse 1983, 58.

44 In alchemy it symbolises the transformation of base matter into gold.

45 Werness 2004, 319–321.

#### 4.2 Ouroborus and Snakes



Fig. 3: *Ouroborus Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).*

Another unexpected animal encountered on the gravestones at Highgate are representations of snakes (fig. 3). They often appear on the gates of mausolea as can be seen in a number of examples taken from the ‘Magnificent Seven’ Victorian cemeteries in London. The ouroborus, a snake biting its tail is another recurring image. Taking their symbolic value from snakes’ life-cycle, and in particular from the shedding of their skin, snakes have generally been seen as healing,<sup>46</sup> with a further association with immortality as the Gilgamesh narrative demonstrate. These symbols of rebirth and rejuvenation recur in the ancient world, both in Greece and in ancient Egypt. The latter provides us with the myth associated with the ouroborus as Amduat, the many coiled serpent, «who surrounds the world.» As such the ouroborus symbolises «the pre-cosmic primal state in

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46 As their association with Hippocrates suggests.

which the sun God, and all creation, nightly renewed himself.»<sup>47</sup> The biblical world's view of snakes is clouded by the Genesis 3 account and the book of Revelation 12 and 13 where the association is with temptation and forces of destruction. One of the markers of the Victorian age is a movement towards secularisation and an embracing of classical values. This goes some way to explaining the presence of snakes as 'emblems' of renewal and immortality in the cemetery.<sup>48</sup>

### 4.3 Dove<sup>49</sup>

As the first domesticated bird, doves have had symbolic roles in human culture for a very long time as a messenger (fig. 4). Ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Greece provide associations with love and fertility while the biblical tradition offers a more complex picture.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, in Christianity, doves are associated with peace, a reminder of covenant<sup>51</sup> and immortality<sup>52</sup> as their visual presence in the catacombs testifies. Finally, the dove as Holy Spirit both at the annunciation, and at Christ's baptism suggest that doves represent divine love, and the promise of immortal life. Further associations with gentleness, temperance and faith during the medieval period strengthen their emblematic life and make it particularly appropriate for expressing tenets of faith as well as (temperate) emotions connected with the death of a loved one.

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47 Werness 2004, 377.

48 Werness 2004, 376–382.

49 Werness 2004, 142–145

50 The sacrifice of turtledoves as part of a purification ritual is described in Lev 14:30.

51 These ideas come from the telling of the flood narrative in Gen 6–9.

52 Werness 2004, 143 mentions that the catacombs were called *columbaria* by the Romans who believed that the souls of the dead lived there.



Fig. 4: Dove Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

#### 4.4 Lion<sup>53</sup>

The most spectacular representation of a lion on a grave at Highgate Cemetery is that of a man whose occupation is recorded as someone who traded in animals.<sup>54</sup> Thus the most obvious performative meaning is that of mnemonic for the person for whom the sculpture was made. However, in view of the emblematic character of the lion as an image, we also suggest that it functions at other levels. The Ancient Near Eastern world de-

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53 Werness 2004, 254–259

54 George Wombwell (1777–1850) was a famous showman who founded the first «traveling menagerie» in 1810. Wombwell's tame lion, Nero, is the model for the sculpture. See «George Wombwell» In «Public Amusements of the Week» *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 31 May 1846: 6, [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) (accessed May 18, 2014).

veloped a complex web of associations between lions and notions of justice, power, victory and resurrection as well as lion as guardian (fig. 5). Notwithstanding its biblical associations with the tribe of Judah, and its subsequent association with the evangelist Mark and Jerome, the lion's connection with its emblematic function in funerary art originates from medieval heraldry.<sup>55</sup>



*Fig. 5: Lion Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).*

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55 Werness 2004, 259 gives the example of Richard I, «Lionheart».

4.5 *Pelican*<sup>56</sup>

An old legend mentioned by Hope B. Werness about how the female sacrifices its blood for her chicks contributed to its association with the sacrificial death of Christ.<sup>57</sup> This image of self-sacrifice pervades the imagery in Christian art and can be understood to be an apt symbol of the pervasiveness of life after death (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: *Pelican Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).*

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<sup>56</sup> Werness 2004, 323–324.

<sup>57</sup> She quotes the *Physiologus*, a medieval book of moralised beast tales which describes that after the pelican kills its chicks, the mother tears her side and the blood that pours out «resurrects» the chicks after three days. Werness 2004, 324.



5. *Some Reflections on the Performativity of Representations of Plants and Animals*

Reading these images of the natural world with their multiple references to the ancient world and also to nineteenth century associations, they «perform» in a number of ways. The most down to earth meaning of landscaped cemeteries was a response to Chadwick's «miasma» theory, the gases and smells of the decomposed bodies which were understood at the time to be a danger to the health and well-being of the living. The trees and shrubs were understood «to absorb deleterious gases»<sup>58</sup> and thus to perform a cleansing role in urban developments.

Furthermore, the images perform as mnemonic of the person who is buried there, a means of remembrance of his/her functions or qualities. This is important for the Victorian period which sees a rise in the formation of the individual and felt that individual achievements needed to be recorded and celebrated. One way to live this was through the creation of «personal markers».<sup>59</sup>

Thirdly, the images form a complex network of symbols which point to a Victorian belief system about death.<sup>60</sup> Doves for instance are a symbol of earthly love and marriage, but their presence on the tombstone also hints at spiritual values shared by the mourners. Indeed, heavenly reunion of lovers and family members were increasingly part of funeral sermons in the course of the 19th century.<sup>61</sup> William Branks, a clergyman, argued that personal recognition of family in heaven would be combined with continuing affection for those remaining on earth and described Heaven as a «home with a great and happy family in it».<sup>62</sup> These symbolic representations contribute to the idea of immortality as an afterlife shared with God and the earthly family and became the mainstay of Christian funeral sermons during the Victorian era which frequently referred to the departed as «those who have gone before».

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58 Curl 2000, 69.

59 Gillon 1972, ix.

60 These often connect with ancient symbols which might represent belief in the afterlife. See Crewe 2009, 80–81.

61 «As Hell ceased to be a fiery furnace, Heaven became a cosy fireside where long-lost loved ones congregated», Hilton 1988, 335–336.

62 See William Branks, *Heaven our Home*, Edinburgh, 1861, iii, iv, viii cited by Jalland, 1999, 237. For more examples, see Bickersteth 1866 and Wheeler 1990, chapters 2–4.

Finally these symbols must not detract from another purpose: they domesticate grief and bereavement, by transforming the stark realities of death into an emotionally restrained, temperate, moral and civilised death and function as state control to keep its nation in good moral order. In this respect, the images function as an aid to the performance of the 'good death', good for the state and political power.

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# Highgate Cemetery's Landscape as a Matrix of Imagination

*Alberto Saviello*

«Death will bring here—not blight and barrenness—but increased and  
increasing life and beauty.»

William Justyne about St James' Cemetery at Highgate, 1865

## *1. Introduction*

When entrepreneur, architect and inventor Stephen Geary (1797–1854) founded the London Cemetery Company (LCC) in 1836, the English capital's young cemetery business was already competitive. The British parliament had previously permitted two other joint-stock enterprises to establish burial sites in the outskirts of London at Kensal Green (opened 1833) and at West Norwood (opened 1837).

Although only a small number of the 113 cemetery companies that had been founded between 1820 and 1853 in the United Kingdom followed a strictly profit-oriented model, this was precisely the goal of the LCC, which aimed to flourish «by selling luxury burial services».<sup>1</sup> An Act of Parliament allowed the company to build three cemeteries north, south and east of the metropolis.<sup>2</sup> Initially Geary concentrated resources on St James' Cemetery at Highgate, because it was essential for the company's success to make its first project a showpiece. The site itself, of approximately 17 acres at Highgate Village, a neighbourhood of stately mansions approximately four miles from the centre of London, was bought for the relatively modest sum of £3,500. Critics claimed, however, that the bulk of the capital of £100,000 that had been invested by the company's shareholders was spent on the landscaping, gardening and architecture of the cemetery.<sup>3</sup>

A particularly promising model for the design of Highgate was the very first European garden cemetery Père Lachaise, which was opened in Paris

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1 See Rugg 1997, 105–106; Penny, 1974.

2 Act of Parliament 17 August 1836, (6&7 William IV, c 136, local); see Curl 1972, 88.

3 See Arnold 2006, 138; Collison 1840, 173

in 1804. Not only had the Parisian cemetery become a major tourist attraction, the idea of creating a burial ground in a landscape garden setting had already proved to be successful in Great Britain, too: Glasgow Necropolis and Kensal Green Cemetery were flourishing interment sites.<sup>4</sup> What made Père Lachaise and its imitators so popular? First of all Père Lachaise strongly contrasted with the condition of traditional burial-grounds in urban churchyards. Due to the rapidly rising populations of Europe's major cities the normally rather narrow churchyards had begun to overflow with human remains. Many critics regarded them as places hazardous to health and inappropriate for a permanent and respectful burial.<sup>5</sup> Père Lachaise, by contrast, previously a private park, provided a lofty terrain to promenade upon with a varied landscape and plantation, which afforded a captivating view of the city from its hilltop. Furthermore, when it was opened as a public cemetery, pieces of solemn architecture were added to enhance its respectability as a burial ground.<sup>6</sup> Most of these features can also be found in British garden cemeteries and Highgate took up this model as well. However, I will suggest another quality that made Highgate special and assured its appeal in the *longue durée*: St James' at Highgate was designed to stir the visitors' imagination and to open up perspectives on death and life that were new, stimulating, inclusive and yet compliant with social and religious norms.

Cemeteries are generally highly regulated public places that can be considered to be thresholds or liminal spaces where the «communities» of the living and the dead come into contact and, in a transcendental sense, where the immanent world meets with the realms of the otherworld.<sup>7</sup> Cemeteries are locations where a society's collective imaginary relating to cultural and religious concepts of death and afterlife are materially and symbolically expressed, performed and experienced.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Michel Foucault chose the 19<sup>th</sup> century rural cemetery as an example to outline his concept of a heterotopology.<sup>9</sup> According to the French philosopher a het-

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4 Only six years after the consecration of Kensal Green, the company's shares had doubled their value. See Curl 1972, 79.

5 On the disastrous conditions of the Victorian graveyards see for example Arnold 2006, 94–122.

6 See Etlin 1984.

7 See also the articles of Carla Danani and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati in this book.

8 For a more detailed definition of the «cultural imaginary» see the introduction to this book.

9 See Foucault 1984. The Foucaultian model of the heterotopos has also been applied to Highgate Cemetery by Clements 2017.

erotopos is a kind of utopia enacted in a real place. It is a place separate and different from all common places of a society. It is regarded as sacred and forbidden or, at least, it is regimented by its very own rules. The most important criterion of the heterotopos for the purpose of our discussion is that it not only mirrors the mundane spaces of society but that it can also invert and contest these common places.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a cemetery reflects the norms and structures of a community but it is also a space of experimentation where a society's self-image can be tested, mingle with the unreal, become distorted and changed.

By analysing historical images and texts I will show that the original layout of the older western part of Highgate Cemetery can be understood as a semantic matrix that through its pathways and sceneries creates a «narrative» outline, which could be taken up and individually shaped when perambulating the terrain. In other words, the landscape and architecture of St James' cemetery set a basic semantic framework that, physically, affectively and intellectually experienced, enabled and guided the visitor to conceive his or her own stories.

Since a cemetery is less a closed and finished entity than, for example, a book or a painting but is an object of constant change through natural growth and decay, seasonal differences as well as through the continual addition of individual monuments, it cannot be my aim to «discover» one exclusive meaning of the landscape.<sup>11</sup> Instead, I will address the following questions to the original 19<sup>th</sup> century design of Highgate: What did the designers of Highgate do to stimulate favourable imaginations in the visitors' minds? What kind of semantic fields did they address when constructing different objects and sceneries? To what extent did the overall design of the cemetery provide a basic interpretative guideline for the sensations it sought to provoke? I will try to show that the general semantic plot underlying the cemetery's layout has a hierarchical and normative structure that, nevertheless, enabled the visitors to imagine death and afterlife in different ways.

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10 See Foucault 1984, 6.

11 For a critique of interpretations that tend to overstress the parallels between gardens and other media like painting and literature see Hunt 2006.

## 2. Landscape Cemeteries as Sites of Imagination

That the sight of a landscape is able to stimulate the viewer's imagination is an idea as old as the concept of 'landscape' in Europe itself. Francesco Petrarca's (Petrarch's) famous *Mont Ventoux-Epistle* (c. 1350) is often cited as the first testimony of an aesthetic appreciation of a natural landscape by an early modern individual. The panorama from the top of Mont Ventoux not only induced the poet to give a neat topographical description, but the landscape also inspired him to meditate on ancient myths and history, the human capacity of sight, his own biography, and finally (turning to Augustine's *Confessions*) higher religious truths.<sup>12</sup>

Much later the landscape's capacity to exalt human imagination was theoretically outlined by Joseph Addison in a series of essays *On the Pleasures of the Imagination* (1712) and became an essential concept in the English Garden movement. Addison understood imagination (or 'fancy') as a mental faculty that was «furnished with ideas» via the exterior senses, especially sight.<sup>13</sup> It was a capacity of social relevance not only indispensable for poets but for the gentleman as well, who should cultivate a 'polite imagination' in order to profit from the effects it had on morality and health.<sup>14</sup> The strong linkage between landscape and imagination is based in part on the traditional association of the literary arts with gardening that goes back to antiquity and that was also stressed by Addison in his comparison of different garden designs with poetic genres: «I think there are as many Kinds of Gardening as of Poetry: Your makers of parterres and Flower Gardens, are Epigrammatists and Sonneteers in this art, Contrivers of Bowers and Grottos and cascades are romance writers.»<sup>15</sup> The equation of the composition of gardens and texts was adopted by writers and garden enthusiasts like William Shenstone who wished his garden «The Leasowes» (created 1743–1763) to «resemble an epick or dramattick poem.»<sup>16</sup> To promote this kind of perception Shenstone indicated the optimal viewpoints of his garden by the placement of benches and combined the vistas with inscriptions and poems given on boards.<sup>17</sup> In his *Essai sur les jardins* (1774)

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12 On Petrarch's 'peak experience' see Michalsky 2006.

13 Addison 1803 (1712), 72.

14 Addison 1803 (1712), 73.

15 See Addison's fictitious reader's letter «On the Pleasures of the Imagination», Addison, 1806 (1712), 23–24. On the parallels between writing and gardening see also Grillner, 2006; Tabarasi, 2007, 162, 369–393.

16 Shenstone 1764, 128.

17 See Verschragen 2000, 79.



the French theorist Claude-Henri Watelet drew a more structural parallel between literature and gardening when he equated the pattern of pathways in a park with the exposition of a romance;<sup>18</sup> as if the avenues, paths and trails were a succession of phrases and sentences that were read walking the terrain.

In fact, the layout of walks and visual axes was one of the major concerns in the English garden movement because it was regarded as having a strong effect on imagination.<sup>19</sup> Addison had opposed the geometrically outlined baroque garden, which enabled the visitor to discern the entire extent of a terrain at first sight, as giving little nourishment to imagination and opted, instead, for the «wide Fields of Nature, [where the sight] is fed with an infinite variety of Images.»<sup>20</sup> It was a common idea that the number of images produced by a garden could be increased by the use of undulating paths and winding vistas. In the view of the British politician and garden theorist Thomas Whately, for example, the irregularly curved footpath was not only more graceful than a straight one, it also enriched the sensual experience of a garden by offering a plurality of possible views.<sup>21</sup> Another statement for the inspiring power of undulating designs was made by the architect Edward Kemp in *How to layout a garden* (1850): «A wavy line is [...] indefinite and awakens the idea of infinity with its exhaustless stores for the imagination and it is of the commonest occurrence in natural scenery.»<sup>22</sup>

These ideas, developed in regard to the landscape garden, were also deemed valid for the layout of the new cemeteries.<sup>23</sup> In light of a long tradition of placing sepulchral monuments in natural ambiances that goes back to Arcadian myths,<sup>24</sup> advocates of the British cemetery movement emphasised that a landscape garden setting could engender manifold imaginations by offering interrelated sensations of nature, architecture, tombs and epitaphs that blend in with the visitor's remembrance of the dead. Very meaningful in this sense is a passage from John Strang's *Necrop-*

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18 See Watelet 1774, 24.

19 See Dauss 2012.

20 Addison 1803 (1712), 73; see Baridon 2006, 69.

21 Whately 1770, 17–18; On the importance of imagination in Whately's concept see Wimmer 1989, 170–171.

22 Kemp 1858 (1850), 133.

23 Nevertheless, prominent garden designers like John Claudius Loudon disliked cemeteries that completely followed the model of a park or «pleasure ground». See Loudon 1843, 19–20.

24 On the tradition of burials in parks and gardens see Linden-Ward 2007, 29–80.

*olis Glasguensis* (1831), in which the later chamberlain of Glasgow stresses the positive effects a picturesque cemetery can have on one's imagination:

If the corrupters of Christianity still attempt to terrify rather than to console humanity, and if superstition still exercises her fatal spell, does it not become the duty of every wellwisher to his species to pour into the tomb the light of religion and philosophy [...] The decoration of the cemetery is a mean peculiarly calculated to produce these effects. Beneath the shade of a spreading tree, amid the fragrance of the balmy flower, surrounded on every hand with the noble works of art, the imagination is robbed of its gloomy horrors the wildest fancy is freed from its debasing fears. Adorn the sepulchre, and the frightful visions which visit the midnight pillow will disappear; and if a detestation for annihilation, mingled with the fondest affection for those who are departed, should lead men still to believe that the dead hold communion with the living, the delightful illusions which will result from this state of things, will form a pleasing contrast to the vile superstitions that preceded them. Let the fancied voice of a father pierce, in the silence of the night, the ear of the son, who lives unmindful of his parent's early counsels, or let the shade of a warning mother appear in the lunar ray, to the thoughtless and giddy eye of her who threatens to sacrifice her beauty and her virtue at the shrine of flattery. These fancies — the children of a pious sorrow, will neither debase the human mind, nor check the generous impulses of the human heart.<sup>25</sup>

Strang contrasts the horrible superstitions induced by inappropriate and distasteful burial grounds (implicitly referring to the situation of the urban graveyards) with the beneficial imaginations that arise from a conjunction of the mourner's loving remembrance of the departed with a synergy of pleasurable sensations offered by the garden cemetery. In the latter case even the illusion of a communication with the dead would promote morality and Christian belief.

William Justyne, the author of the first guide to Highgate cemetery, likewise stresses imagination as one of its most worthwhile effects. In his first lines he wonders: «Is it imagination which makes us feel an inspiration pure and celestial while we walk noiselessly from grave to grave?»<sup>26</sup> Justyne uses a romantic topos describing how the distance to the city and the access to nature free his imagination: «Poetry revels in the bosom of

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25 Strang 1831, 61–62.

26 Justyne 1865, 8.

Nature, and is nourished by the broad study of her laws, but it withers in the cold and selfish atmosphere of a great city.»<sup>27</sup> In this little book it is oftentimes the fusion of different sensations of artful monuments, their inscriptions, the flora and fauna, a natural shade or flash of light with the author's learning that triggers his poetic expression. At the moment, for example, when Justyne was reading the inscription of the delicate tomb of Emily Zoete a butterfly settled on one of the dwarf granite columns, and after being zoologically identified as «*papilio io*» (peacock butterfly), the author feels forcibly recalled to cite some verses of a poem, in which the state of pupation is paralleled with the grave and the following eternal freedom of the soul.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. *Highgate Cemetery as Semantic Framework*

The ground map of the western part of Highgate Cemetery (fig. 1) shows that David Ramsey, the planning landscape architect, gave most of the primary routes a sinuous shape. The effects of enhancing a landscape's grace and variety assigned to these forms have already been mentioned and were acknowledged also by the contemporary press. In November 1838, even before Highgate was officially opened, the weekly journal *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* praised how the serpentine walks intriguingly bind the plantations and monuments and produce the illusion that the relatively small cemetery ground is three times its extent.<sup>29</sup> Compared to the models proposed by other contemporary cemetery architects, Ramsey chose a middle way avoiding the extremes of a strict rectangular layout, suggested most prominently by John Claudius Loudon to be the most appropriate and solemn solution,<sup>30</sup> or of very flowery and artificial designs like the one advertised by a successful American cemetery company (fig. 2). In doing so Ramsey complied with the ideal of the landscape garden in which paths should correspond to the natural terrain and not appear as a product of deliberate artistry. In fact, the rising gradient of the ground on which Highgate Cemetery was built gave a natural explanation for the need of winding walks.

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27 Justyne 1865, 12.

28 See Justyne 1865, 23–24.

29 *The Mirror* [...], No. 32/3, 1838, 290.

30 Loudon 1843, 19.

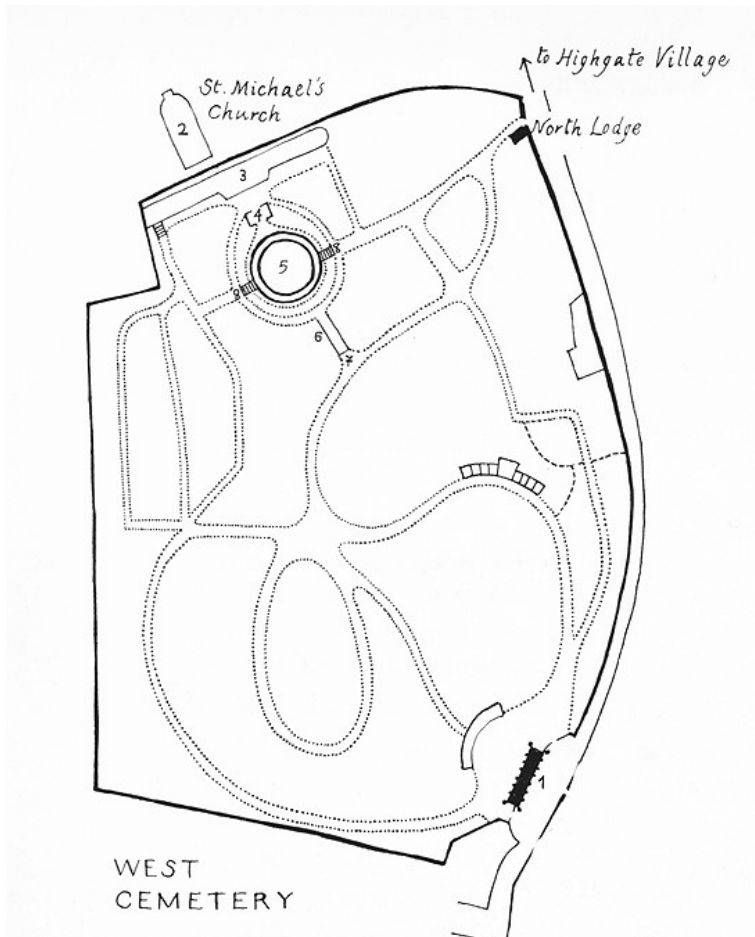


Fig. 1: Ground Map of Highgate Cemetery Western part (Image: Alberto Saviello 2017).

That St James' was laid out on a hillside can be regarded as one of its fundamental characteristics. The main entrance of the cemetery, a neo-Tudor-style building (fig. 1, no. 1; fig. 3), which contained two separate chapels for the funeral services of Anglicans and Dissenters, was erected at Swain's lane at the lower southern end of the grounds. Thus, every visitor had to climb the sloping terrain at least up to the point of the grave she or he intended to see but oftentimes also up to the hilltop where two other features rewarded the visitor for the «strenuous» walk: the neo-gothic Church

of St Michael's that had been built shortly before the cemetery by Lewis Vulliamy in 1832 (fig. 1, no. 2; fig. 4) and the so called terrace catacombs whose asphalted platform offered a vista over the neighbouring districts and the city of London (fig. 1, no. 3; fig. 5). The view of both, church and panorama, almost at the topographical peak of Highgate hill formed the turning point of the visit and thus a kind of climax. While the Anglican building of St Michael's opened a semantic field of relatively restricted associations, the connotations of the panorama were less concrete.

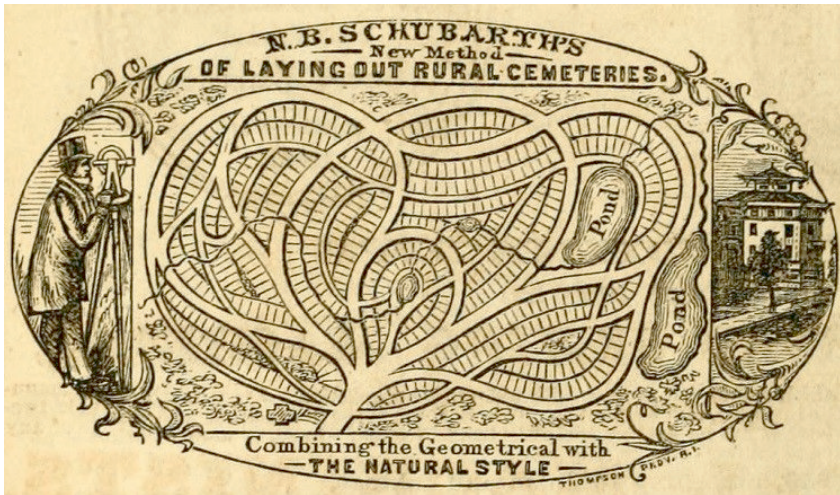


Fig. 2: *Plan for a Rural Cemetery by Niles B. Schubarth of Rhode Island, United States, wood engraving, 1861 (Image: Wiki Commons).*<sup>31</sup>

31 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schubarth\\_cemetery.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schubarth_cemetery.jpg) (accessed August 19, 2020).



Fig. 3: Entrance to the London Cemetery, Highgate, wood engraving, in: *The Mirror* [...], 15.9.1838, title page.

Fig. 4: H. A. Gillman, *St Michael's Church Highgate*, 1832, lithographed by W. L. Walton.



Fig. 5: *Highgate Cemetery*, 1841 [with a View of London], wood engraving.

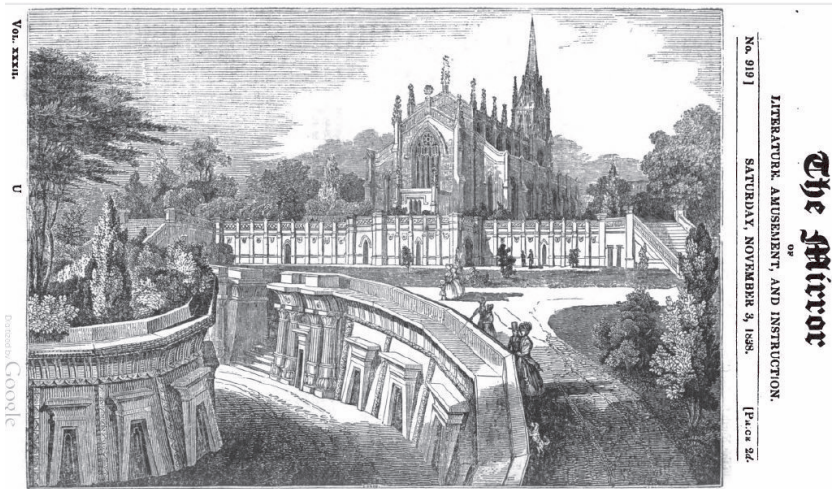


Fig. 6: I. Dodd, North London Cemetery, Highgate, [The Terrace Catacombs and St Michael's], wood engraving, in: *The Mirror* [...], No. 32/3, 1838, title page.

Although St Michael's was not institutionally affiliated to the cemetery and stands outside of its terrain, in an etching from *The Mirror* of 1838 (fig. 6) the catacombs and the staircases on both sides leading to the roof terrace almost appear as the architectural basis, functioning as the crypt of the church.<sup>32</sup> This impression is reinforced by the dense sequence of pilaster strips structuring the catacombs' front wall and its elongated portals with gothic arches that match very well with the church's buttresses and lancet windows. Even the church's rectangular protruding apse corresponds to the catacomb's median risalit, the middle entrance jutting out from the facade. It seems that through this architectural affiliation Geary wanted to profit from the church's vicinity and to get a share in its splendour and religious significance.<sup>33</sup> The importance of the adjacent church for the cemetery has been emphasised also by contemporary reports. *The Penny Maga-*

32 *The Mirror* [...], No. 32/3, 1838, 291: «A glance at the engraving [fig. 6] will show how excellently Mr. Geary has availed himself of the contiguity of this beautiful structure, by forming the terrace and Gothic catacombs immediately beneath it; and thus the church becomes one of the grandest ornaments of the cemetery.»

33 Sometimes, in case of funerals for prominent persons St Michael's was used instead of the small chapels at the cemetery's entrance for the funeral service. See *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1848, 204.

zine and John H. Lloyd's *The History, Topography and Antiquities of Highgate* state that to the cemetery's «great advantage» the church can be seen from almost every part of its ground.<sup>34</sup> What this advantage exactly meant, was not clarified by the authors but it can be suggested that it was seen in the church's iconic as well as symbolic value, namely that it towered over the other important monuments of the cemetery as a symbol of Christianity (fig. 7).<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, taking into account that every visit started by passing through an entrance that was a chapel in neo-gothic style, both end-points of the cemetery's landscape were unmistakably marked by Christian architecture stylistically referencing English tradition.



Fig. 7: Charles Knight, *Entrance to the Catacombs of the Cemetery at Highgate*, wood engraving, in: *The Penny Magazine*, 21.12.1839, title page.

34 The Penny Magazine, 21.12.1839, 489; Lloyd, 1888, 494–495.

35 In this sense also Loudon recommended that the chapel of a cemetery should «be placed in a central and conspicuous situation, so as, if possible, to be seen from all the prominent points of view along the roads and walks.» Loudon 1843, 19.



Less distinct in its meaning but nevertheless important for the landscape's attractiveness was the airy view of the metropolis that could be enjoyed from the terrace catacombs (fig. 5). This scenic outpost was already popular among excursionists before the ground became a cemetery and it is lauded in almost every contemporary description of Highgate. For its function as a turning point of the cemetery's walk it seems important that it broadened the view after the visitors had been more focused on specific sepulchral monuments – representatives of individual human fates – or on single natural objects. It was believed that distant views had a pleasing and relieving effect on the mind. The poet Thomas Miller, for example, wrote in his description of a visit to Highgate that in overlooking the open country and the trees and flowers that cover the graves he felt accompanied by «those who now «sleep their long sleep» and that the panorama «cause[s] us to contemplate death kindly.»<sup>36</sup> The effect that the view had on Miller complies with contemporary philosophical and literary interpretations in which wide vistas were linked to the ideas of infinity and the sublime; sometimes the distant horizon was even understood to be an actual attribute of the divine.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, a landscape's panorama was much more open for individual imaginations than specific signs or symbols. Accordingly, Joseph Addison understood «a spacious horizon as an image of liberty»,<sup>38</sup> «liberty» in the context of politics as well as of imagination. The view from Highgate hill could even be endowed with allegorical meaning, as in John Galsworthy's first volume of *The Forsyte-Saga* from 1906, when the silhouette of London turns into a personification of mourning at the burial of dear aunt Ann:

From that high and sacred field, where thousands of the upper middle class lay in their last sleep, the eyes of the Forsytes travelled down across the flocks of graves. There—spreading to the distance, lay London, with no sun over it, mourning the loss of its daughter, mourning with this family, so dear, the loss of her who was mother and guardian. A hundred thousand spires and houses, blurred in the great grey web

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36 Miller 1852, 275.

37 On the meaning of distant vistas in the English landscape garden see Linden-Ward, 2007 (1989), 144–145.

Addison 1803 (1712), 77: «Such wide and undetermined prospects are as pleasing to the fancy, as the speculations of eternity or infinitude are to the understanding.»

38 Addison 1803 (1712), 77. What Addison understood in a political sense coincides with individual freedom and liberty of imagination.

of property, lay there like prostrate worshippers before the grave of this, the oldest Forsyte of them all.<sup>39</sup>

The integration of the panorama into the story does not point to a religious or spiritual meaning like a description of St Michael's may have done at this point. But the mourning city is meant to aggrandize the importance of Ann Forsyte as exponent of a specific historic mentality, a person with whom a part of Victorian England was gone and a whole era would come to an end.

That the space of a cemetery cannot be regarded as being homogenous in the values ascribed to it can already be learned from the sophisticated price list for the burial spots. They ranged from £6 5S for the interment of an adult in the «eastern» part of the terrain (probably referring to the dissenter's area), to £10 10S in the centre, £14 for a single coffin in the terrace catacombs, £18 in the Egyptian Avenue and up to £20 in the circle of the Cedar of Lebanon catacombs.<sup>40</sup> Even aside from pure economic data other historical cemeteries show, too, that the more prominent burial plots at the centre and preferably at crossroads were more sought after than less frequented areas.<sup>41</sup> By far the most expensive spot at Highgate was not even listed in the official charts. In 1876 the newspaper baron Julius Beer paid £800 for a piece of ground to build a beautiful mausoleum for his daughter Ada who had died at the tender age of eight years (fig. 1, no. 4). The location he chose can be described as the most conspicuous individual plot in the whole cemetery. It lies just above the Circle catacombs and in the cemetery's main axis running along the Egyptian Avenue, traversing the Cedar of Lebanon and the centre of the terrace catacombs.

As already mentioned the catacombs of the Egyptian Avenue and those of the Circle of Lebanon were even more expensive than the terrace catacombs. The circular trench around an old magnificent Cedar of Lebanon (fig. 1, no. 5; fig. 6), a tree that already formed part of the estate when it still belonged to the Ashurst family, was constructed excavating the earth around it. The portals to the catacomb chambers in this artificial underground were designed by Geary in 1839 in an Egyptianising style. The straight Egyptian Avenue (fig. 1, no. 6), which leads to the circle, and its magnificent gate with Egyptian pilasters, flanking obelisks and a flying serpent in the middle of its frieze (fig. 1, no. 7; fig. 8) were added three years later by James Bunstone Bunning (1802–1863), who became Geary's suc-

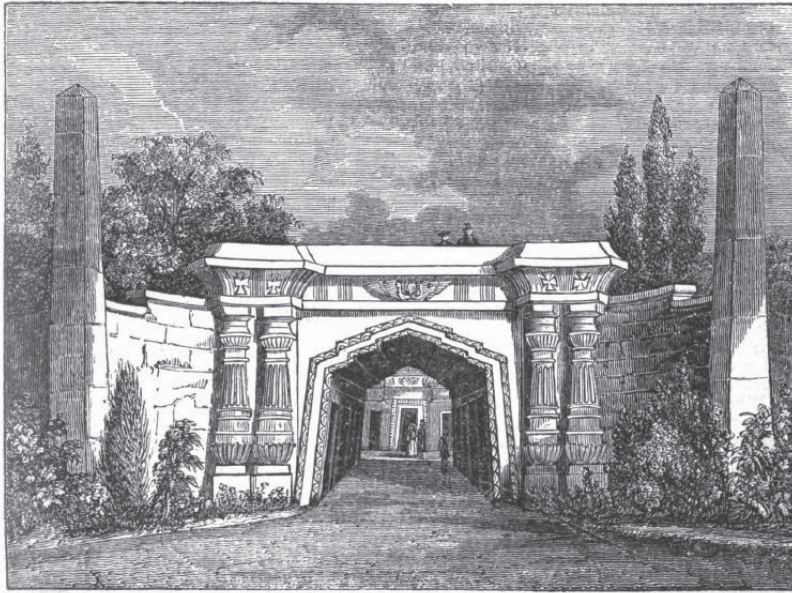
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39 Galsworthy 2001, 79–80.

40 See Cauch 1840, 63–64.

41 See Dorgerloh 2015, 94.

cessor as surveyor of the LCC in 1839. Finally, in 1870 probably due to great demand another 16 chambers with portals in a classical style were built along the outer wall of the trench surrounding the Cedar.



(THE EGYPTIAN AVENUE.)

*Fig. 8: The Egyptian Avenue, wood engraving, in: The Mirror [...], 3.11.1838, 292.*

The architects' choice of neo-Egyptian monuments was fashionable and innovative. In England the neo-Egyptian style had become increasingly popular around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the English gained military access to the land of the Nile and tomb raiders like Giovanni Battista Belzoni shipped Egyptian monuments and artefacts to London. While a range of individual sepulchres had previously been built in the neo-Egyptian style at other places, Highgate represented the first time that this style was applied to monuments constructed by a cemetery management company itself.<sup>42</sup>

The connotations of the Egyptian style were manifold. First of all, this style had been associated with sepulchres since antiquity. Already ancient

<sup>42</sup> See Curl 1994, 178, 196–200.

European authors knew that the pyramids were the burial sites of the Pharaohs. In Roman antiquity and again in Renaissance times Egyptian forms had been used for funerary monuments. In modernity, the Egyptian style was regarded as heavy and grave, giving an impression of timelessness and safety; and the antiquity of the Egyptian monuments underlined their suitability to preserve memory for eternity.<sup>43</sup> Corresponding to the concept of an *architecture parlante* or «appropriate architecture», in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Egyptian style was applied to public buildings like cemetery gates and prisons – places which are designed to safely keep their «residents» inside – or to structures like bridges and railway stations that should convey strength and durability.<sup>44</sup> From an intellectual and historical point of view, ancient Egypt was regarded as the «cradle of science and art, of philosophy, of science, and of legislation.»<sup>45</sup> Thus, it was applied to libraries and courts of justice. However, it could also symbolise secret and hermetic knowledge especially when it was referred to in esoteric contexts.<sup>46</sup>

That the Egyptian portal at Highgate and the subterranean avenue actually recalled ancient burial cults as well as a kind of esotericism can be seen from some contemporary descriptions. *The Mirror* notes that the gate's «solemn grandeur» and «gloomy appearance» carries «the imagination to the sepulchral temples at Thebes described by Belzoni.»<sup>47</sup> Entering «the awful silence of this cold, stony death-palace» Justyne suggested that «we might almost fancy ourselves treading through the mysterious corridors of an Egyptian temple» and Lloyd had the impression that the underground avenue «lead[s] into the very bosom of the hill.»<sup>48</sup> In his analysis of Egyptian monuments in 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape gardens, Jean-Marcel Humbert stresses their function to create «esoteric garden pathways allowing one to wander simultaneously in the material world and in the world of ideas.»<sup>49</sup> Especially, in the context of Freemasonry, Egyptian garden objects and figural elements formed an «initiatory journey, or at least an esoteric experi-

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43 See Carrot 1978, 103.

44 See Curl 1994, 180.

45 See Strang 1831, 6.

46 See Carrott 1978, 109, 133.

47 *The Mirror* [...], No. 32/3, 1883, 290.

48 Justyne 1865, 33; Lloyd 1888, 494.

49 Humbert 2006. On neo-Egyptian style in Freemasonry see also Curl 1994, 134–136.

ence», a «passage from darkness to light, the ultimate test before access to the domain of Knowledge and Wisdom.»<sup>50</sup>

Besides the impression of gravity and duration appropriate for cemetery architecture, it seems that constructing the Egyptian catacombs Geary and Bunning also deliberately aimed at a mystifying or even initiatory effect. Interesting in this regard is the junction of the straight Egyptian Avenue with the circular path around the Cedar of Lebanon that leads to an affiliation of the evocation of ancient Egypt with a natural monument. It is perhaps not by chance that such a connection can already be found in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 31:2–3), in which the magnificent Cedar of Lebanon is compared to the Assyrian Empire. In the parable that was meant as a warning to the Pharaoh of Egypt the Cedar, which became arrogant growing so tall that it «set its top among the clouds» (Ezek 31:10–12, English Standard Version), was ordered by God to be felled. Furthermore, in Victorian England the Cedar was regarded as the sacred tree of the Jews and even a seat of gods in Indian cults.<sup>51</sup> Thus, both the tree and the Egyptian architecture could hint at ancient cultures and allude to the Old Testament, epitomizing in their antiquity and exoticism the idea of unknown hermetic and natural wisdom. In the Victorian era «Tree-worship», which was often combined with ritual circumambulation, was considered to be one of the oldest forms of religion.<sup>52</sup> The architectural layout at Highgate, which made it possible for visitors to circle the Cedar, whose trunk and shadowing branches emerge even more stunningly and magnificent when seen from underground, lends it the character of a ritual or even a sacred object. Circumambulation was and is part of rituals in different religions – described by Eliade as corresponding to an archaic concept of a sacred, cyclic time.<sup>53</sup> It is often connected with the idea of transposing profane into sacred time and opening-up access to the mystical centre. Correspondingly, also in 19<sup>th</sup> century British popular belief it was a method to connect with the otherworld.<sup>54</sup> The Egyptian Avenue and the Circle of Lebanon combined to constitute a dense setting of features to incite mystical, unorthodox and even pagan imaginations. What would Geary and Bunning have said if they knew that the Egyptian part of the cemetery would become fa-

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50 Humbert 2006, 199, 208.

51 On the cedar see for example *The Evangelical Register*, March 1838, 95–96.

52 *The Family friend*, Midsummer 1864, 125–130.

53 See Eliade 1959, 16–62.

54 Menefee 1985.

mous as a setting for ghost stories and horror films in the following centuries?<sup>55</sup>

Already contemporary authors were «very doubtful whether the Egyptian style is the most appropriate for a Christian burial-place.»<sup>56</sup> Loudon uttered this criticism because the Egyptian monuments evoked a religion that he considered «the most degraded and revolting paganism which ever existed.»<sup>57</sup> Instead, he was of the opinion that cemetery architecture should remind visitors of Christian salvation, a purpose for which he regarded the Gothic style as much more suitable. Similarly, Augustus Welby Pugin, who argued that architectural styles had different moral values, contested the Egyptian revival.<sup>58</sup> In his eyes, the use of neo-Egyptian style for cemetery buildings and decorations produced the «grossest absurdities.»<sup>59</sup>

It would have been problematic for the LCC if its cemetery buildings had been regarded by a majority of public voices to be pagan-like or unfitting for Christian burial. An important means of avoiding such a verdict was surely that the Egyptian monuments formed only a part, and definitely not the climax, of the cemetery's «narration». The darkness and concentration felt when stepping through the Egyptian portal and «into the very bosom of the hill», being surrounded by human remains in the underground avenue and circumambulating the roots of the Cedar of Lebanon, can be seen as a dramaturgical passage to increase the effect of the following scenery of the airy panorama of the terrace catacombs and the lofty spires of St Michael's. Entering the Egyptian avenue and the circle, the visitors had the choice to simply follow the path that without making any progress «conducts again to the entrance», like Lloyd somewhat disappointedly wrote, or they could «elevate» themselves taking one of the two opposing staircases (fig. 1, no. 8) that standing in an orthogonal axis to the Egyptian Avenue led away from the underground to another, now wider circling path on the upper level in front of the gothic terrace catacombs.

Thus, it was not only the «frame» of the gothic buildings at the end-points of the cemetery's visit that assured a Christian interpretation of the landscape. Also the ascending terrain can be read, especially in relation to the sequence of the sceneries, as evoking the idea of a (mental) progress that develops from mystery and darkness in the Egyptian underground to

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55 Huckvale 2012, 112–113. See also the contribution by Anna-Katherina Hoepflinger in this volume.

56 Loudon 1837, 16.

57 Loudon 1837, 16.

58 Curl 1994, 91, 181, 183.

59 Pugin 1895, 12.

the 'brighter' prospects of a wide panorama attached to a ritual place of Christianity. The implicit hierarchy of the cemetery's monuments can also be felt by looking at the engraving the *Penny Magazine* chose to present Highgate and in which the tower of St Michael's seems to watch over the Egyptian portal and the Cedar (fig 7). And again visitors well-versed in the Old Testament could even quote Ezekiel's parable linking the Cedar to the Pharaoh when leaving the underground level: when the haughty Cedar was felled, «all the peoples of the earth have gone away from its shadow and left it» (Ezek 31:12, English Standard Variation) – The Jewish-Christian God destroyed the magnificent 'world-tree' in order to overcome polytheism and lead the people to the light.

#### *4. Imagined Roots: Conclusion*

It was not only the natural features and winding paths of Highgate Cemetery that were meant to stimulate the visitors' imagination, it was also the variety of artistic styles applied to the architecture that opened different semantic fields and could sometimes evoke even seemingly conflicting associations. The contemporaneous use of neo-Gothic and neo-Egyptian architecture was highly eclectic and it is consistent with Foucault's definition of a heterotopos: it juxtaposes spaces – an Egyptian 'temple' and a Christian church – that are incompatible in the everyday world.<sup>60</sup> But this confrontation was not meant to put the different architectural objects on an equal footing. Instead it was supposed to create a dialectical tension in which the Egyptian was linked to darkness, concentration and cyclical movement and the Gothic to light, liberty and progress. At first sight, the structure of the rising terrain as well as the change from darkness to light enforced by the architectural setting both imply a superior status of the Gothic elements. This would correspond to the arguments uttered in the contemporary «Battle of Styles», in which the Gothic was advertised as belonging to the recent era of an already enlightened English civilisation, while (ancient) Egypt was seen as foreign, unchristian and overcome.<sup>61</sup>

But why were the burial plots in the Egyptian part so attractive to contemporary buyers? This question cannot be explained by the fashionable

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60 Foucault 1984, 6.

61 On the idea of the «Battle of styles» a term that was coined in 1860 and that ascribed more or less distinct symbolic values to the different styles see Gowans in Eastlake 1975 (1872), X.

quality of the Egyptian style alone. Jan Assmann showed that especially during the English enlightenment ancient Egypt became a model for the construction of what he calls a «religio duplex.»<sup>62</sup> In this sense the contrast between the dark, esoteric, veiled Egyptian mystics and the light, exoteric, revealed Christian religion would form a dualism that merely describes two sides of the same coin: while outwardly overridden and superseded by Christianity, the ancient cult and its secret lore remain a still active (natural) force that even informs the invisible roots of the visibly practiced Christian religion. Such an elitist thinking (elitist because the secret was only accessible to a small group of initiates) could have been appealing for some of the upper Bourgeoisie customers of Highgate.

Perhaps of even greater importance, however, is that the nexus of Christianity with an ancient wisdom has a unifying power: if the religions and denominations in Victorian society are grounded on a common (now buried and invisible) lore their actual differences would appear to be accidental and even negligible. Other than the graveyards at the parish churches, the new cemeteries were built as burial sites for adherents of different religious nominations as well as for disbelievers. While the neo-gothic elements set a normative framework that ostentatiously demonstrates the superiority of the Christian faith, the Egyptian Avenue and the Cedar of Lebanon effect a more intimate and private way of dealing with death. Literally underneath the normative structure, they allude to an ancient religion that was alien to all believers (and infidels) in Victorian England, but that conveys the idea that all concepts of afterlife grow from the same «natural» root.

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62 See Assmann 2014.



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